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MAORILAND: AND OTHER VERSES BY ARTHUR H. ADAMS

FOR AUSTRALIA

SYDNEY
THE BULLETIN NEWSPAPER COMPANY, LTD.
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TO THE BEST OF WOMEN,

MY MOTHER.

I would give it all up at a word from you,
Mother o' mine!
But the strife has begun
That I dare not shun:
Yet my heart looks home to the rest it knew,
To the questionless trust and the welcome true;
And you call to me now as you used to do,
Mother o' mine!

The wonderful years that we shared are flown,
Mother o' mine!
The world has won
The heart of your son;
The child has died in the man full grown;
The path of my life I must tread alone,
And I dare not return when you call your own,
Mother o' mine!

My heart in the chill of the world grows cold,
Mother o' mine!
But lives may run
Ere your love be done,
And the child I remember you still enfold
In the passionate peace of your heart's warm hold—
For ever for you I 'm the child of old,
Mother o' mine!

SYDNEY, *September 1, 1899.*

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Of the sixty-seven pieces contained in this volume, thirty-four are now printed for the first time. Twenty-eight pieces were originally published in THE BULLETIN, *three in* BRACKEN'S ANNUAL, *and two in* THE AUSTRALIAN MAGAZINE.

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MAORILAND.

MAORILAND, my mother!
Holds the earth so fair another?
O, my land of the moa and Maori,
Garlanded grand with your forests of kauri,
Lone you stand, only beauty your dowry,
Maoriland, my mother!

Older poets sing their frozen
England in her mists enshrouded;
Newer lands my Muse has chosen,
'Neath a Southern sky unclouded;
Set, a solitary gem,
In Pacific's diadem.

Land of rugged white-clad ranges,
Standing proud, impassive, lonely;
Ice and snow, where never change is,
Save the mighty motion only
Where through valleys seared and deep
Slow the serpent glaciers creep.

Land of silent lakes that nestle
Deep as night, girt round with forest;
Water never cut by vessel,
In whose mirror evermore rest
Green-wrapt mountain-side and peak,
Reddened by the sunset's streak.

Land of forests richly sweeping,
By the rata's red fire spangled;
Where at noonday night is sleeping,
Where, beneath the creepers tangled,
Come the tui's liquid calls
And the plash of waterfalls.

Land where fire from Earth's deep centre
Fights for breath in anguish furied,
Till she from the weight that pent her
Flings her flames out fiercely lurid;
Where the geysers hiss and seethe,
And the rocks groan far beneath.

Land of tussocked plain extending
In the distant blue to mingle,
Where wide rivers sigh unending
Over weary wastes of shingle;
Cold as moonlight is their flow
From the glacier-ice and snow.

Land where torrents pause to dally
'Neath the toi's floating feather,
Where the flax-blades in the valley
Whisper stealthily together,
And within the cabbage-trees
Hides the dying evening breeze.

Land where all winds whisper one word,
"Death!"—though skies are fair above her.
Newer nations white press onward:
Her brown warriors' fight is over—
One by one they yield their place.
Peace-slain chieftains of her race.

Land where faces find no furrow,
With the flush of life elated;
Where no grief is, save the sorrow
Of a pleasure that is sated;
Land of children lithe and slim,
Fresh of face and long of limb.

Land of fair enwreathed cities,
Wide towns that the green bush merge in;
Land whose history unwrit is—
Memory hath no chaster virgin!
Land that is a starting place
For a newer, nobler race.

Maoriland, my mother!
Holds the Earth so fair another?
O, my land of the moa and Maori,
Garlanded grand with your rata and kauri,
Lone you stand, only beauty your dowry,
Maoriland, my mother!

ON THE PLAINS.

ALONE with the silence, the sun and sky,
Full length on the tussocky plain I lie:
An ocean of yellow from east to west
Still rolling and sweeping, far crest on crest;
And billow on billow the tussocks bend
Until in one shimmering haze they blend;
Where, under the distance, the heat and noon,
The plains in an ecstasy thrilling, swoon
And melt in the yellow-tinged, sombre air,
Like perfume from roses on evenings rare.
Where the sky and the misty horizon meet
The flax-bushes float, like a far-off fleet;
As slowly they swim, with no spray nor splash,
Their green sails swell, and their brown oars flash;
So, lost in two oceans—of plain and sky—
Full length on the tussocks alone I lie.

THE DWELLINGS OF OUR DEAD.

THEY lie unwatched, in waste and vacant places,
In sombre bush or wind-swept tussock spaces,
Where seldom human tread
And never human trace is—
The dwellings of our dead!

No insolence of stone is o'er them builded;
By mockery of monuments unshielded,
Far on the unfenced plain
Forgotten graves have yielded
Earth to free earth again.

Above their crypts no air with incense reeling,
No chant of choir or sob of organ pealing;
But ever over them
The evening breezes kneeling
Whisper a requiem.

For some the margeless plain where no one passes,
Save when at morning far in misty masses
The drifting flock appears.
Lo, here the greener grasses
Glint like a stain of tears!

For some the quiet bush, shade-strewn and saddened,
Whereo'er the herald tui, morning-gladdened,
Lone on his chosen tree,
With his new rapture maddened,
Shouts incoherently.

For some the gully where, in whispers tender,
The flax-blades mourn and murmur, and the slender
White ranks of toi go,
With drooping plumes of splendour,
In pageantry of woe.

For some the common trench where, not all fameless,
They fighting fell who thought to tame the tameless,
And won their barren crown ;
Where one grave holds them nameless—
Brave white and braver brown.

But in their sleep, like troubled children turning,
A dream of mother-country in them burning,
They whisper their despair,
And one vague, voiceless yearning
Burdens the pausing air . . .

" Unchanging here the drab year onward presses ;
No Spring comes trysting here with new-loosed tresses,
And never may the years
Win Autumn's sweet caresses—
Her leaves that fall like tears.

And we would lie 'neath old-remembered beeches,
Where we could hear the voice of him who preaches
And the deep organ's call,
While close about us reaches
The cool, grey, lichened wall."

But they are ours, and jealously we hold them ;
Within our children's ranks we have enrolled them,
And till all Time shall cease
Our brooding bush shall fold them
In her broad-bosomed peace.

They came as lovers come, all else forsaking,
The bonds of home and kindred proudly breaking ;
They lie in splendour lone—
The nation of their making
Their everlasting throne !

RAIN IN THE BUSH.

THE steady soaking of the rain,
The bush all sad and sombre ;
The trees are weeping in their pain,
Dank leaves the ground encumber.

A dismal ghost of silence strays
From shade to dusky daylight;
O'er all a whispered horror weighs,
Like mist athwart the grey light.

A frightened robin in the ferns
Peeks fearfully and lonely,
But back to comfort him returns
The drip of rain-drops only.

The fern-fronds shiver when they feel
Cold foot-prints press like mist, as
Dim forms beneath the creepers steal
And vanish in the vistas.

THE STORM AND THE BUSH.

THERE are only two things in the world—
The storm in the air and the stretch of
green leaves;
The flesh of the forest that quivers and heaves
As the blast on its bosom is hurled.

Above is the whip of the wind
That scourges the cowering forest beneath:
The Storm spits the hiss of the hail from his teeth,
And leaves the world writhing behind!

Like a beast that is bound in a cage
When the keeper's lash lights and the keeper's
goad stings,
Each tree his great limbs to his torturer flings
In a groaning and impotent rage.

As the leaves to a fiercer gust lean
The wind throws their undersides upward to sight,
And the foam of the forest-sea flashes to white
Out over full fathoms of green.

THE COMING OF TE RAUPARAHA.

BLUE, the wreaths of smoke, like drooping banners
From the flaming battlements of sunset
Hung suspended; and within his whare
Hipe, last of Ngatiraukawa's chieftains,
Lay a-dying! Ringed about his death-bed,
Like a palisade of carven figures,
Stood the silent people of the village—
Warriors and women of his hapu—
Waiting. Then a sudden spilth of sunlight
Splashed upon the mountain-peak above them,
And it blossomed redly like a rata.

With his people and the twilight pausing;
Withering to death in regal patience,
Taciturn and grim, lay Hipe dying.

Shuddering and green, a little lizard
Made a ripple through the whare's darkness,
Writhing close to Hipe! Then a whisper
On the women's dry lips hesitated
As the ring of figures fluttered backwards;
"'Tis the Spirit-Thing that comes to carry
Hipe's tardy soul across the waters
To the world of stars!" And Hipe, grimly,
Felt its hungry eyes a-glitter on him;
Then he knew the spirit-world had called him;
Knew the lizard-messenger must hasten,
And would carry back a soul for answer.

Twenty days in silence he had listened,
Dumb with thoughts of death, and sorely troubled
For his tribe left leaderless and lonely.

Now like sullen thunder from the blackness
Of the whare swept a voice untinctured
With a stain of sickness; and the women,
Breaking backwards, shrieked in sudden terror,
"'Tis the weird Thing's voice, the greenish lizard,
All-impatient for the soul of Hipe!"
But the warriors in the shadow straightened
Drooping shoulders, gripped their greenstone meres,
And the rhythmic tumult of the war-dance
Swept the great pah with its throbbing thunder:
While their glad throats chanted, "E, 't is Hipe!
Hipe's voice that led us in the battle;
Hipe, young, come back to lead us ever!"

"Warriors and women of my hapu,"
Whirled the voice of Hipe from the darkness,
"I have had communion with the spirits;
Listen while I chant the song they taught me!

"I have seen the coming end of all things,
Seen the Maori shattered 'neath the onrush
Of the white-faced strangers. Like the flashing
Of the Sun-God through the ranks of darkness,
Like the Fire-God rippling through the forest,
Like the winter's silent blight of snowflakes—
Lo, the strange outbreak of pallid blossoms!—

Sweeps this surging wave of stranger-faces,
Frothing irresistibly upon us.

"Lo, the Pakeha shall come and conquer;
We have failed; the Gods are angry with us.
See, the withered autumn of our greatness!

"Old ancestral myths and sacred legends
That we deemed immortal—(priest and wizard
Died, and yet their stories, like a river,
Through the long years ran on, ever changeless!)—
Shall be buried; and the names long given
To each hill, and stream, and path and gully,
Shall be like a yesterday forgotten,
Blown like trembling froth before the sea-breeze.

"And the gods that people all our islands—
This great sea of presences immortal,
Living, real, alert for charm or evil,
Hurrying in every breeze, and haunting,
Heavy-winged, the vistas of the forest,
Deluging the daylight with their presence,
Teeming, flooding, brimming in the shadows—
Shall be banished to their spirit-regions,
And the world be lorn of gods and lonely.

"And the Maori shall no long time linger
Ere, a tardy exile, he shall journey
To the under-world. Yet he shall never
Break before this influx, but shall fight on

Till, a mangled thing, the tide o'erwhelm him.
And my tribe, the mighty Ngatiraukawa,
Had they left one worthy chieftain only
Who could lead my people on to victory,
Who could follow where my feet have trodden,
Might yet rear their name into a pillar
Carved with fame, until their stubborn story
From the mists of legend broke tremendous,
Flaming through the chilly years to follow
With a sunset-splendour, huge, heroic!

"Yes, the time is yours to rear a nation
From one conquering tribe, the Ngatiraukawa;
But my pah is leaderless and lonely;
I am left, the last of Maori chieftains;
And the gods have called me now to lead them
In their mighty battles! There is no one
Worthy now to wield my dying mana!"

So he ceased, and tremulous the silence
Sighed to voice in one long wail of sorrow.
So; it was the truth that Hipe taught them:
None was left to lead them on to victory;
None could follow where his feet had trodden.

Then by name old Hipe called the chieftains—
Weakling sons of that gaunt wrinkled giant,
Stunted saplings blanching in the shadow
Of the old tree's overarching greatness.
One by one he called them, and they shivered,

For they knew no answer to his question,
"Can you lead my people on to victory?
Can you follow where my feet have trodden?"

One by one a great hope burned within them,
And their feeble hearts beat fast and proudly;
One by one a chill of terror took them,
And the challenge on their lips was frozen.

Then the old chief in his anger chaunted
Frenziedly a song of scorn of all things,
And the frightened people of the village—
Warriors and women of his hapu—
Quavered into murmurs 'neath the whirlwind
Of his lashing words; and then he fretted
Into gusts of anger; and the lizard
Made a greenish ripple in the darkness,
Shuddering closer to him. And the people
Bending heard a whisper pass above them,
"Is there none to lead you on to victory,
None to follow where my feet have trodden?"

Lo, a sudden rumour from the edges
Of the silent concourse, where the humblest
Of the village crouched in utter baseness—
There among the outcasts one leapt upright,
Clean-limbed, straight and comely as a sunbeam,
Eager muscles clad in tawny velvet,
Eyes aflash with prescience of his power,
Yet a boy, untried in warriors' warfare,

Virgin to the battle! And untroubled
Rang a daring voice across the darkness,
"Yes, my people, one there is to lead you;
I dare point you on to fame and victory,
I dare tread where Hipe's feet have trodden.
Yea," and prouder sang the voice above them,
"I can promise mightier fame unending;
I shall lead where Hipe dared not tempt you;
I shall make new footprints through the future—
I, the youth Te Rauparaha, have spoken!"

On the boy who braved them stormed the people,
Swept with fear and anger, and they clamoured,
"Who so proudly speaks, though not a chieftain?
Rank and name and fame he has none; how then
Dare he lead when sons of chieftains falter?"

But the boy leapt forward to the whare,
Clean-limbed, straight and comely as a sunbeam,
Eager muscles clad in tawny velvet,
Eyes aflash with prescience of his power,
Swinging high the mere he had fashioned
Out of wood, and carven like a chieftain's—
Aye, and with the toy had slain a foeman!
Flinging fiery speech out like a hailstorm,
"If ye choose me chieftain I shall lead you
Down to meet the white one on the sea-coast,
Where his hordes shall break like scattered billows
From our wall of meres. Him o'erwhelming,

I shall wrest his flaming weapons from him,
Fortify for pah the rugged island
Kapiti; then like a black-hawk swooping
I shall whirl upon the Southern Island,
Sweep it with my name as with a tempest,
Overrun it like the play of sunlight,
Sigh across it like a flame, till Terror
Runs before me shrieking! And our pathway
Shall be sullen red with flames and bloodshed,
And shall moan with massacre and battle!

"Quenching every foe, beneath my mana
Tribe shall stand with tribe, till all my nation
Like a harsh impassive wall of forest
Imperturbably shall front the strangers;
And with frown inscrutable shall wither
All this buzz and stir of stinging insects
That persist about us; then our islands
Garlanded with peace are ours for ever!

"Then the name of me, Te Rauparaha,
And the tribe I lead, the Ngatitoa,
Shall be shrined in sacred myth and legend
With the glamour of our oft-told prowess
Wreathed about them! Think, we shall be saviours
Of a race, a nation! And this island
We have sown so thick with names—each hillock,
Glen and gully, stream and tribal limit—
Shall for ever blossom like a garden

With the liquid softness of their music!
And the flute shall still across the evening
Lilt and waver, brimming with love's yearning!
And the exiled gods and banished spirits
Shall steal back to people all our islands
With their sea of presences immortal,
Living, real, alert for charm or evil,
Hurrying in every breeze and haunting,
Heavy-winged, the vistas of the forest,
Deluging the daylight with their presence,
Teeming, flooding, brimming in the shadows,
Till the world, a tawny world of gladness,
Shall no more of gods be lorn and lonely!
I, the youth Te Rauparaha, have spoken!"

Hipe heard, and, dying, cried in triumph,
"Warriors and women of my hapu,
He shall lead you, he, Te Rauparaha!
He shall do the things that he has promised.
He may fail; but think how grand his failure!
He alone can lift against the tempest
That proud head of his, and hugely daring,
God-like, hugely fail, or hugely conquer!"

Still he spoke, but suddenly the lizard
Made a greenish ripple through the darkness,
And was gone! Upon the long lone journey
To Te Reinga and the world of spirits
It had started with the soul of Hipe!

Then the plaintive wailing of the women
Quavered through the darkness, and a shudder
Took the slaves that in a horror waited
For the mercy of the blow to send them—
Ah! the sombre, slowly-stepping phalanx—
To the twilight world with Hipe's spirit.

WRITTEN IN AUSTRALIA.

The wide sun stares without a cloud:
  Whipped by his glances truculent
The earth lies quivering and cowed!
  My heart is hot with discontent—
  I hate this haggard continent.

But over the loping leagues of sea
A lone land calls to her children free;
My own land holding her arms to me
Over the loping leagues of sea.

The old grey city is dumb with heat;
  No breeze comes leaping, naked, rude,
Adown the narrow, high-walled street;
  Upon the night thick perfumes brood:
  The evening oozes lassitude.

But o'er the edges of my town,
  Swept in a tide that ne'er abates,
The riotous breezes tumble down;
  My heart looks home, looks home, where waits
  The Windy City of the Straits!

The land lies desolate and stripped;
  Across its waste has thinly strayed
A tattered host of eucalypt,
  From whose gaunt uniform is made
  A ragged penury of shade.

But o'er my isles the forests drew
A mantle thick—save where a peak
Shows his grim teeth a-snarl—and through
The filtered coolness creek and creek,
Tangled in ferns, in whispers speak.

And there the placid great lakes are,
And brimming rivers proudly force
Their ice-cold tides. Here, like a scar,
Dry-lipped, a withered watercourse
Crawls from a long-forgotten source.

My glance, home-gazing, scarce discerns
This listless girl, in whose dark hair
A starry-red hibiscus burns;
Her pallid cheeks are like a pair
Of nuns—they are so fragile-fair;

And like a sin her warm lips flame
In her wan face; swift passions brim
In her brown eyes, and ebb with shame;
Her form is sinuous and slim—
That lyric line of breast and limb!

But one there waits whose brown face glows,
Whose cheeks with Winter's kisses smart—
The flushing petals of a rose!
Of earth and sun she is a part;
Her brow is Greek and Greek her heart.

At love she laughs a faint disdain;
Her heart no weakly one to charm;
Robust and fragrant as the rain,
The dark bush soothed her with his balm,
The mountains gave her of their calm.

Her fresh young figure, lithe and tall,
Her twilight eyes, her brow benign,
She is the peerless queen of all—
The maid, the country, that I shrine
In this far banished heart of mine!

But over the loping leagues of green
A lone land waits with a hope serene—
My own land calls like a prisoner queen—
But oh! the long loping leagues between!

THE BRAVE DAYS TO BE.

I looked far in the future; down the dim
Echoless avenue of silent years,
And through the cold grey haze of Time I saw
The fair fulfilment of my spacious dream.

My Maoriland! she sat a new-crowned queen,
Hilarious and radiant with youth,
Superbly throned above a world of peace
By the mere power of loveliness. She held
No tribute lands that she had trampled on
With pitiless foot of triumph; but she lay
Alone, incomparable, complete, the one
Untarnished blossom of the sterile sea,
Thrusting her dazzling petal-peaks above
A world of waving green.

Her daughters fair—
Their hair a halo darkly clustering,
Their rich brown cheeks brides to the southern sun—
Lifted their regal faces like a blaze
Of summer blossoms swaying on lithe stems!
Her sons—a grove of slender saplings tall
And sun-flecked, quivered with a joy all Greek
To every passing breath of loveliness:
Their forms were moulded with a supple might,
Yet in their blood a subtle languor dreamed.
Not theirs the hearts Titanic and the thews
Of those who first a meagre sustenance tore
From the reluctant soil, whose axe and torch

To the grim depths of forest fastnesses
Brought the parturient light.

This was the time
When all were children of a mother State,
And for the common weal did common work;
And all had freedom, for no man was free
In thought or deed to do his neighbor scathe.
This was the culminating noon, the crown
Of Time, to which our leaders, rudely husked,
But kernelled with a rich humanity—
Struggling, confused, with steps irresolute,
Now crashing forward in a moment's space
Through barriers that a thousand grey-haired years
With hands laborious had built; and now
False paths retracing with a tardy step;
Anon awaiting with a wearied hope
More light, more light, to see the forward path;
Brimming with pride and huge with selfishness,
Yet with a patriot purpose burning deep
And one great yearning hope unquenchable—
Had won their way!

And while my lusty land
Felt in her veins the triumphant sap, and heard
The wonder of the Spring shout in her heart,
Across the waters peering, chin in hand,
A grey old crone mumbled the name that once
Was Britain! Spent with mighty pasts her soil,
And sodden with a hundred histories;

Her old frame enervated with the pangs
Of bearing progenies of giant men
Who shackled the careering centuries
To one small island's name! The end had come.
Upon her fallow fields huddled her brood
Of teeming pigmies, craven beneath their pride;
Too weak to wield the sword their fathers forged,
Too rich to risk the shock of war. Like leaves
In autumn winds, about their uncertain feet
Their shrivelled greatness swept.

And in that time
My land was still unconquerably young—
Bland skies above and freedom in the air—
And in her children irresistibly
This charm of surging youth swirled into song
Supreme—a strain to which the ancient globe
Surrendered in still rapture. As I dreamed
I heard that chorus of the future swell
Above the clanging years. Within those songs
The dreaming rivers of the yellow plains
Rippled and rustled ever; and the creeks
Through green-draped gullies of the listening bush
Ran garrulous; and in the shadowed gorge
The great tides, placid, imperturbable,
Marched to the distant sea.

The mountain peaks
Struck proudly through the mists, and on their sides
The sun a thousand changing colours flung

Till in the eve they flamed like pennants far
Above the flood of gloom; and pile on pile
The massive ranges to the westward swept,
With all the opulence of purple bush
Imperial. At their feet the great lakes dreamed
In august taciturnity, their robes
Hemmed with the sullen blaze of rata-fire.
Above, the silence of the forest hung—
A firmament with white clematis starred—
Where never cry of bird or beast rang out
Piercing the tangle of the undergrowth,
Save that afar a plaintive weka wailed,
Or high upon some noble ancient tree,
Moss-hung and creeper-broidered, all his soul
A tui poured into one soft refrain.
Out in the open by the swampy pools
The army of the waving grasses went;
First in the van the hosts of raupo reared
Long lines of ruddy spears; close following
The green ranks of the harekeke came;
Lifting aloft their sullen flashing blades
And sturdy bronze-brown standards; and, behind,
The toi's white battalions flaunted far
Their dazzling banners and soft silver plumes;
While gaunt and motionless upon the hill
The naked cabbage-trees stood sentinel.

And in the haggard country of the North
Between the uncouth hills of manuka

The white steam drifted like the dying breath
Of some huge dragon overthrown. The earth
Writhed with a scrofula of quivering sores;
Her thick warm blood, exuding sluggishly,
In pools of ugly reluctant bubbles oozed.
Yet, like a poet wedded to his pain,
Who, in a clogging body crucified,
Binds his fierce heart-beats into spheral song,
The troubled earth wove from her agonies
Such fret-work fantasies of silica,
Such wonders of ebullient steam, such pools
Of quivering heat, such crater lakes that were
Cool chalices uplifted, that the land
About that mystic lake—where like faint winds
Old haunting legends drifted, sad with tears—
Was all an elemental epic wrought
Of fire and earth and water.

But alas!
Over the isles a whispered story went—
A memory of vague laughter and of life
Irrevocably mute, for ever mourned.
From his high place the Maori, the erect
Brown, sturdy efflorescence of the isles
Had fallen. Nevermore the warriors
Superb in pride of kingly thews, with spear
And murdering mere through the shrinking land
Imperiously strode; or with the tune
Of even-plashing paddles woke to life

The silent reaches of the dreaming fiords.
And nevermore through nights perfumed with love
Lay Hinemoa hidden, listening
Amid the prattle of the troubled reeds,
And heard across the lake the flute-song swell—
The token that Tutanekai was true.
His race had lapsed and dwindled, withering
In too luxurious a land of peace,
And pining, like a frail transplanted flower,
For those strong bracing winds of lust and war
That were his life. Stifled in summer calm,
He should have died in harness, fighting still;
Hurling against the changing tide of things
A word for endless war: like Rewi, when
Erect amid the remnants of his tribe,
Looming Titanic o'er his ruined world,
He stood, and to his white foes' proffered peace
His last defiant challenge proudly flung—
"We shall fight on; there shall no peace be made
For ever and for ever and for ever!"

LOVE MOTIVES.

TO YOU.

So you have come at last!
And we nestle, each in each,
As leans the pliant sea in the clean-curved
limbs of her lover the beach;
Merged in each other quite,
Clinging, as in the tresses of trees dallies the
troubadour night;
Faint as a perfume, soft as wine,
Yielding as moonlight—mine, all mine—
So I have found you at last!

I dreamed; we dare not meet:
The time is yet too soon;
Swept with the tumult of perfect love, our souls
from this life would swoon—
For the fusion of our lives
Is the sole great goal to which the vast creation
vaguely drives;
And only when I kiss your face
Shall the last great trumpet shatter Space—
I dreamed; we dare not meet!

Yet somewhere, hungry-eyed,
You lie and listen with tears,
Clogged with the flesh, and dulled with the sodden
heritage of the years.
And I am alien, lone,

Hedged with the palisades of self, shut in—a soul unknown.
You, fashioned for me from Time's first day,
I, moulded for you ere that dawn was grey,
Wait hidden, hungry-eyed!

I lie in the lonely night;
And you?—perhaps so near
That if I should whisper your sweet soul-name you would joyously leap and hear!
And yet perhaps so far,
Drowned in the cosmic mist beyond the swirl of the farthest star;
But over the universe yawning between,
With wistful eyes you listen and lean,
Alone in the lonely night!

Perhaps your thirsty arms
Some stranger youth entwine,
And you will yield him thin, faint kisses, thinking his lips are mine;
He thinking that unawares
He has caught, as once in a dream he caught, that miracle-glance of hers.
The pathos of the thing that seems!
Each clasping memories, kissing dreams.
In passionate-thirsty arms!

So you will yearn through life,
Or maybe you did not wait:
You married him, and his neutral smile you learnt
to sullenly hate;
Or you have lived a lie,
And drank the mockery of his lips, believing that
he was I.
You dreamed, content that you loved him
true,
But the soul of your soul was dead to you—
So I must yearn through life!

Or, starving and passionate still,
To your dreams you were bravely true;
You told the Night your secrets drear, and he
laughed back at you;
And even when you dreamed
You heard his merciless laughter ring, and you
sprang awake and screamed;
Till Age kissed you with a kiss that sears,
And you faded and withered with the years,
Starving and passionate still!

But, hush! I had almost heard:
Last night I dreamed your name;
Like the soft, white tread of a faint, cool cloud to
my desolate sky it came;
Like a moth it drifted away,

And into the flame of the dawn it fluttered, dying
into the day.
Yet the wind in the whispering leaves
The moan of your sobbing weaves—
Hush! I had almost heard.

Yet I should know your face!
As mine, all mine, I claim
That coil of hair that over your bosom smoulders—
a yellow flame;
And the cool, dim-curtained eyes,
The crescent of your imperious chin, and the little
moist mouth that cries.
I have heard through the din of the years
Your voice, with its tincture of tears—
Yes, I remember your face!

Once in the drifting crowd
I thought I had found a clue—
A pale face pealed like an organ-note, and yet—
oh! my heart—not you!
She had your look, the same
Ineffable sorrow of glad young eyes; but all the
rest was shame.
Perhaps she saw—for her eyes were wet—
In me the soul she had one time met
In eternity's drifting crowd!

Perhaps 't is the desert of years
That severs each from each,
And out of the cavernous centuries to each other we blindly reach.
You blossomed so long ago
That only the Dawn and the Spring remember, and little, so little, they know!
You wait on the hill of the first white morn,
Straining dead eyes to me, unborn,
Across the desert of years.

Or when I am dead at last,
And my sovereignty have won,
As merged in the dust of the gradual Past, unliving, I live on,
You will rise with some far-off Spring,
And back to the drear, dead days that were mine your piteous glance will fling.
But, hush! I shall come in the rain-kissed night
And whisper the words of our marriage-rite—
So I shall find you at last!

Yet if we met . . . .
I dreamed; we dare not meet.

LAMENT.

PEACE, your little child is dead:
Peace, I cannot weep with you;
I have no more tears to shed;
I have mourned my baby too—
I, that ne'er was wooed or wed.

Love has looked within your eyes,
Love has filled your hungry heart;
You have borne the babe, your prize;
You have blossomed, done your part,
Though the flower faded lies.

But to me was love denied—
God had said it might not be;
Still my hungry hopes abide;
All the motherhood in me
Aches—and starves, unsatisfied.

How my soul has yearned for thee,
Sweet, sweet unborn child of mine!
How thy life would tenderly
Round thy mother's life entwine—
Hope of hopes that may not be.

How thy hands would pluck my breast!
I have felt them o'er and o'er,
And thy soft, sweet skin caressed,
Baby mine I never bore!
Did I dream so?—dreams are best.

LAMENT.

You have nothing now to fear,
  Mother; you have fondled him,
Held his pretty face so near,
  Laid your lips to each soft limb—
He is dead, but he was dear.

You have something you may mourn,
  Some sweet memory to kiss;
I am lonelier, more forlorn;
  God has left me only this—
My sweet babe that was not born.

ON THE SANDS.

ALL the air was tranced and the sea was stilled,
And we stood and dreamed of a world to be.
When it seemed to me that our souls were thrilled
With a sudden sympathy.

My life's long riddle at last I read,
And the spirit-face I had sought I knew;
All the Past's far years to this hour had led
On the sands alone with you!

And you—you thought that the skies were fair,
And such twilight peace you had seldom known;
And you never guessed that a soul was there
That hungered for your own!

You never knew—there was just the lack
Of a passioned look that would thrill me through,
But the night swept down, with its shroud of black,
And you never, never knew!

A PORTRAIT.

HER glance is equable, serene;
She looks at life with level brow;
She strides through circumstance—a queen!
To compromise she cannot bow—
Even to love she will not lean!

Not hers the head that, like a flower,
Trembles upon a swaying stem;
Her neck is firm-curved as a tower,
And on her brow for diadem
Shine steadfastness and peace and power.

She wills no limits to her scope;
Her head imperiously borne
Above her gradual bosom's slope;
Her chin a dainty-moulded scorn,
Her eyes a deep, untarnished hope.

By gusts of passion undistressed,
She spurs not on a panting pulse;
Throned in her womanhood, at rest,
No ripples of her moods convulse
The tidal swayings of her breast.

She is no fevered Sex to flush—
A woman-weakness that should yield,
A fruit for love to clench and crush,
A fragile warmth that arms should shield,
A whisper that a kiss should hush!

Yet with the tears her soul has shed
  Her innocence is seared within:
Her heart is not a white thing dead:
  She lifted dauntless eyes to Sin,
And from her splendid frown he fled!

But when love breathless to her trips
  And joy within her laughs elate,
Her soul to no surrender slips—
  She meets the kiss that crowns her mate
With vivid eyes and virile lips!

AFTER LONG YEARS.

"AND have I changed?" she asked, and as she spoke
The old smile o'er her pale face bravely broke,
And in her eyes dead worlds of pathos woke.

Changed? When I knew again the ghost of each
Remembered trick of gesture, manner, speech,
And felt the beauty that no years could reach!

"I will go back with you without regret,
For not one word you spoke I dare forget.
And with each kiss of yours I tremble yet!"

"No, you have taken your way; I took mine;
A word may not our severed lives entwine,
Nor will a kiss the shattered years combine!"

She put her arms around me, held me near;
Then forward to her lonely path and drear
She turned her sad, wan face, without a tear.

SONG.

TO a woman's wistful heart
In a startled wave of feeling,
Swift and sudden,
Sweeps love's flood in,
Joy with fear in rapture reeling;
Scathe and sorrow, fret and smart,
In one flush of gladness healing;
Life beclouded,
Sorrow shrouded,
As a sunlit world revealing
To a woman's wistful heart!

To a woman's wistful heart,
Warm with hopes that almost frighten,
Love comes singing,
Gladly bringing
To her loneliness a light in.
Pain and shadowed grief depart,
Every hour life's glories heighten;
Earth's wide wonder
That has shunned her
Like a flower blooms to brighten
In a woman's wistful heart!

BLOSSOM OF LIFE.

SO now she lies silent and sweet
With white flowers at her head and feet,
And she, the fairest flower, between.
The bud that with her bosom's swell
In dear delight once rose and fell
Now wafts her all it has to tell,
And wonders why she sleeps serene.

And yet in life how small a part,
With pretty face and petty heart,
She played! And in that form so fair
There never dwelt a deep desire,
Her bosom never thrilled a-fire:
She loved too lightly e'en to tire—
And all my heart was meant for her.

Was there a soul within those eyes
That seemed to speak my dear surmise,
That with no tears were ever wet?
Through life she laughed her careless way,
She knew not sorrow or dismay—
And I have sorrowed day by day,
While those pale lips are smiling yet!

And so she lies on her small bed,
With white flowers at her feet and head,
And she, the fairest flower between!

In life how false the little *rôle*—
The peerless face, the paltry soul!
But she is perfect now—the whole
Pale blossom of the Might-Have-Been.

THE GOAL.

ON the grey levels of the plain of life
When, slowly swirled,
The moving hills of morning mist
Hedged in the world—
While yet undared the path of toil and strife,
I found a friend
Whose faith I pictured would persist
Until the end.

Then peered the stooping sun across the plain—
The world he kissed;
In sudden glory shimmering
Flamed all the mist!
The sullen Darkness carried off his slain,
And straight away,
Like a forefinger beckoning,
The white road lay.

Her hand in mine, upon the path we pressed;
Together shared
The flowers we plucked—to find them pain;
And forward fared
Till we stood radiant on the mountain crest;
And still ahead,
Dipping to pleasant depths of plain,
The white road led.

But when I urged her onward to the end
Her heart peered out

Upon the road's unswerving leap
In dizzy doubt.
"Nay, we have reached the highest, why descend?"
Her lips demurred—
And with us, gazing at the steep,
There stood a third.

Her eyes clasped his in an embrace of love.
Said they: "No more;
Here on the crest is our abode,
Our journey o'er;
The goal for you!" So, leaving them above,
I went alone—
And still the arrow of the road
Sped on, straight on!

But darker and more desolate the way,
Until I turned—
Lo, in the halo of the sun
The lovers burned,
High on the mountain-top! Ah, what if they,
By passion kissed,
The goal of life and love have won,
And I have missed?

GREY EYES.

SHE glanced across the path to me,
Grey eyes!
Her looks were kisses plain to see.

I gave her glances back to her—
Glad eyes!
She saw the lifting of despair.

From memory a face looked out,
Dim eyes!
No years could sour that love to doubt.

My soul would nevermore be lone—
Bride's eyes!
Hearts still were waiting for my own.

Our souls uncurtained then, perchance—
Deep eyes!
Each built an epoch in a glance.

Out of her fellowship so free
Light eyes!
She gave some gladness unto me.

And I gave? As we turned apart—
Dead eyes!
I saw the shudder in her heart.

JUST A WOMAN.

YOU ask me why I love her;
Not a charm can you discover!
Would you see
The heart that a shut rose is,
And whose beauty ne'er uncloses
Save for me?

She is not rich or clever,
But her speeches thrill me ever,
And with bliss
My heart her whisper flutters,
Though the wisest word she utters
Is a kiss.

All evil things have shunned her,
And with a wide-eyed wonder
Is she tasked,
What lavish god has given
In her earth so much of heaven
All unasked?

She has no gifts or graces,
But the gladness in her face is
Sought of kings;
She cannot chant a measure,
But her heart with a grave pleasure
Ever sings.

Her gown is of the whitest
But the hem is soiled the slightest:
Little worth,
She has no wings to fly with,
And she prefers to hie with
Me on earth.

There is no hint of heaven
Or glimpse of deep thought even
In her eyes;
She is warm and she is human,
Just a weak and wilful woman—
Not too wise.

Her thousand beauties singing,
I have not said how clinging
Are her arms;
But, not loved and not the lover
Dare you ever hope discover
Half her charms?

LULLABY.

DAY has fled to the west afar,
Where no shadows or sorrows are;
O'er earth's radiant western rim
God has gathered the day to him.
Hush! the river of night is here,
Flowing silently, cool and clear,
With its mystical thoughts that throng
And its silences deep as song.

Babe of my bosom, sleep;
Tender, sweet blossom, sleep!
Hearts may ache
While the long hours go creeping;
Hearts may break
While my baby is sleeping;
Never wake,
Though thy mother is weeping;
Babe of my bosom, sleep!

Sleep! the silence is all around,
Save the sighings that are not sound,
Where the wind in the branches weaves
Mystic melodies through the leaves;
Or the far-away murmurings
Like the stir of an angel's wings.
Only night is about us now—
Child, the earth is as tired as thou.

LULLABY.

Babe of my bosom, sleep;
Tender, sweet blossom, sleep!
Hearts may ache
While the long hours go creeping,
Hearts may break
While my baby is sleeping:
Never wake,
Though thy mother is weeping;
Babe of my bosom, sleep!

AFTERWARDS.

NOW that our pathways sever here,
And mine slopes down across the night,
Whence I shall see you burning clear
A beacon on the mountain-height—
Now that our pathways sever here,
I have no kiss, I have no tear.

Your eyes my lonely world have lit
With sunset peace that lingers yet,
And on my gladdened heart is writ
No shade of blame, and no regret.
Your eyes my sombre world have lit,
And made a new world out of it.

Your soul is woven, strand and strand,
With mine across the woof of Time;
Your fingers trickle from my hand—
Yet where you go my soul shall climb.
Our souls are woven, strand with strand;
Think you the pattern was not planned?

Love finds a solace in regret—
With the rich past I am content.
You dare not ask me to forget;
With memories I am opulent.
Love finds this solace in regret:
What solace if we had not met?

The richest guerdon of this earth
  You gave me like a flower to wear;
My heart is dowered beyond dearth,
  A treasure through the dark I bear—
The richest guerdon of this earth,
The knowledge of one woman's worth.

The flower of your dear love is dead;
  But Springs come ever with the years:
I asked you for your heart: instead
  You gave me more, you gave your tears!
The blossom of your love is dead;
But all its fragrance is not fled.

Our ways lie solitary, long,
  And we have done with halt and rest;
On to the goal the others throng,
  No longer may we fare abreast.
Our ways lie solitary, long,
Yet through my sorrow laughs this song:—

Our pathways only now begin
  To close the circle in, complete,
Until our purpose we shall win,
  Until again, far off, we meet.
Our pathways only now begin
To narrow, narrow, narrow in!

The race is ready to be run.
  But clear and certain is our quest;
Your heart the prize that will be won.
  This dallying was but a test
To try us ere the race be run.
Now—now the journey is begun!

Chance is not chance—but very wise.
  I might have missed you blindly. Lo,
The countersign! Without disguise,
  The soul I seek at last I know.
Chance is not chance—but very wise.
We part, that we may recognise.

MY LOVE.

SHE has tender eyes that tell
All her prim, set lips suppress—
Daring thoughts that ever dwell
Prisoned in her bashfulness;
Hints of sudden tenderness
That within her breast rebel.
Till her bosom's fall and swell
Tell her meaning all too well,
To her heart's demure distress.

She has soft, smooth cheeks that flame
As she nestles close, so close,
With the new half-joy, half-shame,
That within her bosom glows,
And each fevered feature shows.
Her hot pulses beat acclaim
Of the hopes she dare not tame,
Fervid thoughts she cannot name—
Till I kiss her, and she knows.

She has clinging arms of white,
Little hands and fingers fine,
And she holds me tight, so tight;
While her eager arms entwine
Deep I drink her kisses' wine.
Hush! I feel through all her slight,
Trembling figure love's delight,
And she knows that all is right,
And her bosom beats with mine.

THE WORLD HAS GROWN SO GREY.

THE world has grown so grey, love,
The weary world so wide;
And autumn seems to stay, love—
'T was autumn when you died.
And everything is strange and new,
For all my world has died with you—
It lacks the light you gave.
And sad-eyed dusk awaits alway,
And the nights wedge in the narrow day
Like the walls of an open grave!

It was so cruel to go, love,
To leave me at your grave;
For Death can never know, love,
How hard 't is to be brave.
Sometimes I smile, my tears between,
For I see the still-born Might-Have-Been
That to your breast you 've ta'en.
But memory wakes with a sudden start,
And the naked truth knells at my heart—
And the world grows grey again!

SATANA.

SHE draws all men to serve her, and her lure
Is her pulsating human loveliness—
The beauty of her bosom's rippling lines,
The passion pleading in her eyes, the pure
Soft contour of her cheek, her dainty dress,
With all the rich aroma of her warm
Glad womanhood perfumed, her supple form
Curving and swaying like a living flower,
Aflush with life and youth. These are the signs
By which she queens the hearts of men, the power
By which she makes her sovereignty secure!

But though her red lips mock me of their wine,
And that low laugh of hers fills me with fire,
As, spent with loving, in her scorn I lie;
Yet some day she will come to me and twine
Her slender arms about me; and desire
Will plead in those eyes that were all disdain,
And break her bosom with a sob of pain,
And her hot lips will lavish all their store
Of hungry kisses on me—then shall I
Remember all her queenly coldness, or
With kisses make her breathing beauty mine?

A WOMAN'S FAREWELL.

SO with this farewell kiss I taste at last
The all of life; the Future and the Past
Upon your dear lips dwell.
Love will not come again, though I implore;
And in my heart a twilight evermore—
Farewell!

A man's heart is so wide that I was wrong
To dream that I could fill it with the song
A woman loves so well;
A woman's heart is narrow, but I filled
Mine brimming with your kisses—none was spilled—
Farewell!

So fierce your love was, I was half-afraid.
The roses blossom and the roses fade;
The withered petals tell!
So high into your heart you lifted me,
So far I have to fall, since it must be
Farewell!

Now all the world I fashioned round me falls;
And from the past one memory calls and calls,
Grieving, and like a knell;
Now all the days like drear regrets shall seem,
And all the nights—the nights! . . I dare not dream!
Farewell!

But what if I can hold you, hold you yet
Till all else but my lips you must forget:
If love could but compel!
But all the mystic hopes our hearts have heard
Must droop and wither to this wistful word—
Farewell!

My love was like a little child to me;
Now in my heart 't is crying piteously—
Hush, dear! all will be well!
My lips on yours for ever! Say again
You love me—though it be not true—and then—
Farewell!

AND YET——:

THEY drew him from the darkened room,
Where, swooning in a peace profound,
Beneath a heavy fragrance drowned
Her grey form glimmered in the gloom.

Death smoothed from her each sordid trace
Of Life; at last he read the scroll;
For all the meaning of her soul
Flowered upon her perfect face.

"In other worlds her soul finds scope;
Her spirit lives; she is not dead,"
In his dulled ear they said and said,
Suave-murmuring the ancient Hope.

"You loved her; she was worthy love.
Think you her spheral soul can cease?
Nay, she has ripened to release
From this bare earth, and waits above."

His brain their clamour heard aloof;
He, too, had said the self-same thing;
But now his heart was quivering
For more than comfort—parched for proof.

He put them from him. "Let me be;
You proffer in my bitter need
The coward comfort of a creed
That tears her soul apart from me.

"She waits in no drear Heaven afar.
  Her woman's soul in all its worth,
  Yearning for me, for homely earth,
No gates of beaten gold could bar.

"No, she is near me, ever close;
  One with the world, but free again;
  One with the breezes and the rain;
One with the mountain and the rose.

"She knows me not; her voice is dumb;
  But aching through the twilight peers,
  And, unremembering, yet with tears,
She strives to say she cannot come.

"Yes, she is changed, but not destroyed;
  The words that were her soul are hushed;
  The gem that was her heart is crushed—
Its fragments white stars in the void.

"And I shall see her in disguise;
  In the grey vistas of the street
  A face that hints of her I meet;
Whispers her soul from alien eyes.

"In Time's great garden, spring on spring,
  The blossoms glow; then at a breath
  Their petals flutter down to death—
Ah love, how brief your blossoming!

"Death has but severed part from part.
Borne on an ever-moving air
The fragrance of her life somewhere
Freshens some lonely wistful heart!

"No word of hers can God forget;
Her laughter Time dare not disperse;
It shakes the tense-strung universe,
And with the chord it trembles yet.

"Each mood of hers, each fancy slight,
In deep pulsations, ring on ring,
Dilating, ever-widening,
Ripples across the outer night.

"Her life with deathless charm was fraught,
And God with smiles remembers now
The puzzled pucker of her brow
Ruffled with sudden gusts of thought.

"And in His cosmic memory wise
Still live her subtle features thin,
Her dear iconoclastic chin,
The grave enigma of her eyes.

"And if beyond she might draw breath,
And know that I was not with her,
The wistful eyes of her despair
Would be more desolate than death.

"But not to meet her in the wide
Night-spaces I must wander through;
To kiss the pretty pout I knew,
And nevermore to hear her chide;

"To speak those childish words that were
So foolish-sweet, so passionate-wise;
Her subtle fragrance recognise
And hear the whispers of her hair! . . .

"Her sun has set; but still, sublime,
She is a star, of God a part;
She is a petal at the heart
Of the eternal flower of Time.

"I triumph so beyond regret,
I win her immortality:
Where, Death, your vaunted victory?
Where, Grave, your sting? And yet—and yet——!"

SONNETS.

A.D. 19— ?

AS in some quiet city bathed in sleep,
Where like a kiss the twilight lingereth,
When suddenly the earth stirs far beneath—
Just moves, then pauses—and a silence deep
Falls on all ere the second shock should sweep
Spire, column, pinnacle to shapeless death!
And white face peers at white face, and no breath
Is drawn, and every heart forgets to leap!

So now across this quiet, dreaming world
The first faint shock has thrilled; and men, aghast,
Wait for the second, whose blind forces pent
Shall in one last convulsion find their vent;
And all the builded fabrics of the past
Shall be in ruins on their builders hurled.

MY LAND.

A NEW land, like a stainless flower set
In the green foliage of the waving sea;
Or like a maiden whose fair heart is free,
Whose honest eyes with no sad tears are wet,
Whose bosom has no passion to forget,
But thrills and lifts exuberant, as she
Voices some sudden-flooding melody!
A land of strength, life, vigour, youth—and yet
An old land, grey as I, her child, am grey;
Filled with the whispers of old thoughts that stir
And wake, like shadows of the past that play
Deep in the beauty of a child's grave eyes,
And show beneath life's gladness glancing there
The pathos of a hundred histories.

LOVE AND LIFE.

I.

AS some faint wisp of fragrance, floating wide—
A pennant-perfume on the evening air—
From a walled garden, flower-filled and fair,
To drape a sudden beauty long denied
Upon life's highway desolate and dried—
So come you to me, as I, unaware,
Bend my strict eyes upon my pathway bare;
But at your presence straight I turn aside,
And passing in the garden see uncurled
The heart of hidden beauty in the world,
And love as life's one blossom is revealed.
My backward glance your floating tresses blind,
About my struggling hopes your white arms wind,
And I have yielded—but how sweet to yield!

II.

Yet, in the prison of the garden bound,
The sluggish perfumes o'er my spirit fall,
And I lie languid in their sweetness' thrall,
Beneath the fragrance of much beauty drowned:
When through the fountain's murmur—lo, a sound
Insistent and reproachful! O'er the wall
Drops a faint echo of the Earth's deep call,
And I leap upright from the rose-strewn ground.
Outside the bracing wind sings, clean and chill;
Outside are tasks to do, blows to be struck;
And I must toil the dreary highway till
It broadens to the fields of death. Yet, ere
I leave for aye your perfumed close, I pluck
A shrivelled blossom that I kiss and wear.

THE NEW WOMAN.

THE stone that all the sullen centuries,
With sluggish hands and massive fingers rude,
Against the sepulchre of womanhood
Had sternly held, she has thrust back with ease,
And stands, superbly arrogant, the keys
Of knowledge in her hand, won by a mood
Of daring, in her beauty flaunting nude,
Eager to drain life's wine unto the lees.

So she shall tempt and touch and try and taste,
And in the wrestle of the world shall lose
Her dimpled prettiness, her petals bruise ;
But moulding ever to a truer type
She shall return to man, no more abased—
His counterpart, a woman, rounded, ripe.

REMINISCENCE.

I STAND in old Earth's presence; over all
The warm, pervading sunshine seems to print
Life and the Present; and there is no glint
Of white bones from the Past's decaying pall;
When, lo! some subtle scent holds me in thrall;
Or an uncertain, evanescent tint,
That of a fuller summer seems to hint,
Wakes long-imprisoned yearnings that recall
Half-memories of strange unthought-of things,
That seem were once a vital part of me—
Unmeasured, mystic, vague imaginings!
And all Life's presence and the sunshine flee,
The listless æons of my life I see,
And in my face the dead Past flaps its wings.

THE FOUR QUEENS (MAORILAND).

WELLINGTON.

HERE, where the surges of a world of sea
Break on our bastioned walls with league-long sweep,
Four fair young queens their lonely splendour keep,
Each in a city throned. The first is she
Whose face is arrogant with empery;
Her throne from out the wounded hill-side steep
Is rudely fashioned, and beneath her creep
The narrow streets; and, stretching broad and free,
Like a green-waving meadow, lies the bay,
With blossom-sails and flower-wavelets flecked.
Elate she stands; her brown and windblown hair
Haloes a face with virgin freshness fair,
As she receives, exuberant, erect,
The stubborn homage that her sisters pay.

DUNEDIN.

And one is fair and winsome, and her face
Is strung with winter's kisses, and is yet
With winter's tears of parting sorrow wet;
And all her figure speaks of bonny grace.
High on the circling hills her seat has place,
Within a bower of the green bush set;
And 'neath her feet the city slopes—a net
Of broad-built streets and green-girt garden space.

Above her high the suburbs climb to crown
Her city's battlements; and in her thrall
Lie sleeping fiords, and forests call her queen.
About her waist she winds a belt of green,
And on her gleaming city looking down,
She hears the Siren South for ever call.

CHRISTCHURCH.

And one within a level city lies;
To whose tree-shaded streets and squares succeed
A vista of white roads and bordering meads,
Until each suburb in the great plain dies.
The clustering spires to crown her fair head rise,
And for a girdle round her form she leads
The Avon, green with waving river-weeds
And swept with swaying willows. And her eyes
Are quiet with a student's reverie;
And in the hair that clouds her dreaming face
There lurks the fragrance of some older place,
And memories awake to die again,
As, confident and careless, glad and sorrow-free
She waits, queen of the margeless golden plain.

AUCKLAND.

Set all about with walls, the last fair queen
Over a tropic city holds her sway;
Her throne on sleeping Eden, whence through grey
And red-strewn roads and gleaming gardens green
The city wanders on, and seems to lean
To bathe her beauty in the cool, clear bay,
That out past isle and islet winds its way
To the wide ocean. In her hair a sheen
Of sunlight lives; her face is sweetly pale—
A queen who seems too young and maidenly,
Her beauty all too delicate and frail,
To hold a sway imperious. But forth
From deep, dark eyes, that dreaming seem to be,
There shine the strength and passion of the North.

TO MY LOVE.

"PAINT me," you said, "a poem; give to me
A breathing thought that I may keep to kiss!"
While that low laugh that aye a mandate is
Nestled upon your lips. Call memory
To that fair moment when you heard my plea,
And in the tumult of my arms' warm bliss,
Like a frail floweret that is crushed amiss.
You thrilled to frenzied life exultantly,
And all your body pulsed with love's desire!
Can I in words that perfect hour rehearse,
Or write the vehemence of veins on fire?
My lips would only kiss—and you require
From my heart's royal hoard one pallid verse—
The grey, cold ashes left on passion's pyre!

THE STARS.

THE terrible tranquillity of space!
My soul shrinks back in sudden doubt. I fear
The myriad eyes that through the ether peer,
And chill the arrogance that dared to trace
The grave enigma of the cosmic face.
Yet through the soundless night a voice austere—
"We that you deem afar are small and near;
With lowly things and humble we have place;
We are but smoke that from a burnt Past rears;
The idle spray God's prow flings in its sweep
Through wider waters; the mere dust that curls
From his vast chariot-wheels as on He whirls;
The futile sparks that from His anvil leap;
Or drifting seeds, pregnant of larger spheres."

THE GIRL AT THE HARP.

LIKE Clotho, at her harp she sits and weaves
With mystic fingers from the swaying strings
A melody that ever louder sings
And my charmed heart in vibrant rapture leaves
All hers! And all her quiet life receives
The peaceful melody which round her clings;
She walks amid suave strains and murmurings
That never doubt or strident discord cleaves.

And from her singing harp she bends to grant
My dear desire; and the poor monotone,
That is my life, in her glad heart she takes,
And, twining its dull phrases with her own
Full-flowing theme of life, of both she makes
The pæan of one love reverberant.

SUNSET.

WHAT horror lurked within the First Man's brain
As downward to the West the Sun-god stepped,
And paused upon the hill-ridge, ere he leapt
Headlong into the night! What cold, dumb pain
He felt, as still he marked the twilight wane,
And on the dragon Darkness crept and crept,
While beating in his mind the question kept,
"Is this Earth's all? Can Day e'er come again?"

And yet, last night, one watched with listless eyes
The stricken Sun-god struggling in his gore,
With wasting red bedabbled, unto whom
Life's joyous sun shall nevermore uprise:
His dream of light has faded, gloried o'er;
His night has come—a night of endless gloom.

THE PERFECT PRESENT.

SO I have kissed you! And this hour is mine.
Its light along the level future lasts,
It crowns a drab eternity of Pasts!
Here soul and soul have crossed the border-line
Of self, and merged. No years can e'er untwine
This hour from us! What though to-morrow casts
The memory out, and your cold glance contrasts
With this day's rich red lips, need I repine?

No. I have kissed you! And the brief warm flower
Born of our lips perfumes eternity.
From the long loneliness that silently
Stretches behind, before, I am content
To cull this blossom of one perfect hour—
To snatch one star from Time's deep firmament!

LOVERS.

I THOUGHT, because we had been friends so long,
That I knew all your dear lips dared intend
Before they dawned to speech. Our thoughts would blend,
I dreamed, like memories that faintly throng.
Your voice dwelt in me like an olden song.
Petal, methought, from petal I could rend
The blossom of your soul; and at the end
Find still the same sweet fragrance.—I was wrong.

Last night in our glad eyes love brimmed to birth;
Our friendship faded, lost in passion's mist:
We had been strangers only! Here, close-caught
Into my heart, nestled the face I sought
So long! And now the only thing on earth
Is your white brow, a-clamour to be kissed!

CHINA, 1899.

SHE lies, a grave disdain all her defence,
Too imperturbable for scorn. She hears
Only the murmur of the thronging years
That thunder slowly on her shores immense
And ebb away in moaning impotence.
Giants enduring, she and Time are peers—
Her dream-hazed eyes knowing no hopes, no tears,
Her glance a langour-lidded insolence.

And though the rabble of the restless West
In her deserted courts set their rash sway,
She heeds them not; as when the sun, withdrawn
From his untarnished sky, knows it distressed
By storm of weakling stars, that he at dawn
Will wither with one ruthless glance away.

ANTAGONISTS.

WHAT though the neutral sea sever us twain?
In the still night your soul in mine I take;
Your eyes, hilarious with passion, wake,
And love's delirium is mine again,
When all your body's warmth swirled in my brain–
Your face uplifted like a pallid lake
Wherein my eager lips their thirst could slake,
With deep-sighed, langourous kisses, keener than pain.

Then suddenly through passion's rosy mists
A shudder trickled, like a stream of blood:
In a grim pause we felt and understood
The everlasting war that was our fate—
The pitiless struggle and primeval hate
Of old implacable antagonists.

SYDNEY.

IN her grey majesty of ancient stone
She queens it proudly, though the sun's caress
Her piteous cheeks, ravished of bloom, confess,
And her dark eyes his bridegroom-glance have known.
In mantle of her parks, serene, alone,
She fronts the East; and with the tropic stress
Her smooth brow ripples into weariness—
Yet hers the sea for footstool, and for throne
A continent predestined. Round her trails
The turbid tumult of her streets, and high
Her graceful domes from squalor stagger up;
Her long, lean fingers, with their grey old nails,
Straining to passionate lips that thirsty sigh
The cool, bronze beauty of her harbour's cup.

MORNING PEACE.

THE sudden sunbeams slant between the trees
Like solid bars of silver, moonlight kissed,
And strike the supine shadows where they rest
Stretched sleeping; while a timid, new-born Breeze
Stirs through the grasses, petulant—her eyes
Half-blinded by the clinging scarves of mist:
Her robes, that tangled through the grasses twist,
Weave as she moves sweet whispered melodies.

O may it be a morn like this, when slow
From a dark world beneath my soul shall go
Through the wet grasses of a purple plain,
Still stretching broader in the cool, grey glow
Of morning twilight: then my soul shall know
That life and love are lost—and found again!

TO ONE SLAIN IN ABSENCE.

AND so we parted, love, oblivious
That we were parting! With our laughter light,
Flouting the future, on the morrow bright
At our old tryst we would once more discuss
The wonder of our love miraculous;
While even then Fate waited, swift to smite.
So you have gone, large-eyed, across the Night,
And I stand straining widowed arms! Yet thus
I want your memory—no tears, no pain,
No presage of chill death, nor any fears;
Your wide glance bridging all eternity
With one calm faith. Is 't not an augury
That somewhere in the tangle of the years
Your laughter and your lips I 'll find again?

OTHER VERSES.

MYSELF—MY SONG.

HERE, aloof, I take my stand—
Alien, iconoclast—
Poet of a newer land,
Confident, aggressive, lonely,
Product of the present only,
Thinking nothing of the past.

If some word of mine abide,
Yet no immortality
Looks my soul for; satisfied,
Though my voice be evanescent,
If it sing the pregnant present
And the birth that is to be.

All the beauty that has been,
All of wisdom's overplus,
Has been given me to glean;
In Earth's story clear one page is—
This—the widest of the ages—
Virile, vast, tumultuous.

I shall croon no love-song old,
Dream no memory of wrong,
Build no mighty epic bold;
From my forge I send them flying—
Fragments glowing once and dying—
Scattered sparks of molten song.

If I bring no gospel bright,
Still my little stream of song
Quavers thinly through the night,
Burdened with a broken yearning,
Still persistent, though discerning
Life has shadows, sorrow, wrong.

So my life shall be my verse.
Here 's my record, stand or fall!
Failure may be mine, or worse,
In the twilight land of living—
With no doubt and no misgiving,
Here 's my life-blood, breath and all!

THE POET TO BE YET.

NOT he who sings smooth songs that soothe—
Sweet opiates that lull asleep
The sorrow that would only weep;
There are some spirit-stains so deep
That only tears may wash away.

Not he whose lays thrill fiercely till
The soul is sick with surfeiting.
Such passion flies, and leaves its sting,
Till through the body quivering
The wearied dull pain throbs again.

Not he whose glad voice says "Rejoice!"
For whom no clouds o'ercast the sky;
Whose god is in his heaven so high
That this dull world he come not nigh:
Life is no sun-kissed optimist!

But he who Sorrow's presence knows,
Who hears the minor chords beneath
The song of life, and feels the breath
Upon his cheek of quiet death,
Yet stirs and sings of life and love.

Who in his suffering yet can sing;
With that calm pathos in his face—
The hopeless yearning of the race—
Can chant the faith that holds its place,
Upsurging through each sore heart's speech;

Who, though his heart bleed, onward leads;
Who knows eternal is our quest,
Yet bids us toil and strive—not rest—
Who looks life o'er and takes its best—
This is the poet to be yet!

MAN AND WOMAN.

[According to Maori mythology, the god Tiki created Man by taking a piece of clay and moistening it with his own blood. Woman was the offspring of a sunbeam and a sylvan echo.]

THUS God made Man to cope with destiny:
Taking the common clay, God moistened it
With His red blood; and so for ever lit
That sombre grossness with divinity.

So Man for ever finds him in the mesh
Of clogging earth; and though divine hopes thrill
And flush his leaping heart, it faints, for still
His dreams are pinioned in the gyves of flesh.

Yet ever God's blood in him courses free,
And, penetrated with eternal hope,
Up Evolution's long, uneven slope
Man lifts him from his sodden ancestry!

And though his eyes the far goal cannot see,
And half the terrors of the dark he knows,
Yet with an inward fire his courage glows;
He bears the torch of immortality.

. . . .

But Woman from a memory had birth.
Into the forest's dignity of shade
A sudden sunbeam groped—a soft hand laid
In silent benediction on the earth.

Then filtered through the green a song forlorn
Of some forgotten bird. Lo! in a mist
Of love the sunbeam and the echo kissed,
And Woman—sunlit memory—was born.

So light and melody to her belong—
The sunlight in the dying echo blurred!
So Woman came—a vision and a word
From the unknown—a sunbeam and a song!

So ever through the forest of the years
Shall Man pursue and still pursue the gleam
That wavers and is gone; and through his dream
The fainting echo of a song he hears.

And when at last his weary feet are led
Into the sacred glade, and she stands there,
He takes her close—all song and sunlit hair:
The gleam has faded and the song has fled!

And though with blinded eyes he cannot see,
She haunts him like a word that he knows not—
That is not quite remembered, nor forgot—
Some thought that hovers near a memory.

As out from Heaven she leans, on earth there falls
The sunbeam of her hair, golden and fine;
And drops an echo of a voice divine—
A voice that ever vainly calls and calls!

And though she spill a splendour and a fire
  Upon the dark, her glory is unknown;
  Behind the screen of self she dwells alone:
She cannot come as close as her desire.

So ever like a pale moon drowned in mist
  Her face is vague—a barrier intervenes;
  And ever from her loneliness she leans,
With waiting eyes, all-wistful to be kissed!

PANSY: SONG-WORDS.

IN a crooked angle
Of a garden bower,
'Neath a weedy tangle
Grew a modest flower;
Unpretending, unoffending,
Gifted but with fancy,
Unassuming in his blooming
Grew that modest pansy.

Ah! pansy, pansy,
Hope springs anew;
But fancy, fancy,
Never comes true.

Comes a maiden bashful,
Wandering here and there,
With her silken sash full
Of roses rich and rare;
Slow she takes them, dewless shakes them
In her shapely fingers,
While to choose some for her bosom
Lazily she lingers.

Ah! pansy, pansy,
Modest in hue;
Sweet fancy, fancy,
Never comes true.

With a lover's anguish
For her glance he sought,
On her breast to languish
Was his daring thought;
If he perished by her cherished,
Life was worth the leaving;
But she passes 'midst the grasses,
And she leaves him grieving!

Ah! pansy, pansy,
Sorrow for you;
But fancy, fancy,
Never comes true.

BLOSSOM.

ALONE rose in a garden burned—a quivering flame,
But yesterday blindly from out the bud it came;
And now an envious wind with itching fingers leant
And touched its lingering beauty, and the petals went
Upon the twilight tossing swift,
Like little dusky boats adrift.

Then in the birth and doom of that brief rose I saw
The long unrolling of creation's one vast law.
All things were blossom, and God thrilled at that flower's birth
As when from night-sheathed chaos broke this blossom-earth.
For God no large or little knows—
A universe slept in the rose.

The scattered star-mist. that dishevelled trails through Space,
Hears the low whisper of the Spring, and to its place
Whirls vastly, and its bulk with aching life is torn,
And with a pang that shakes all Space a sun is born
But God on it bestows the heed
He gives to any wayside weed.

About it bloom the planets, like a pageantry
Of rival blossoms in a garden-galaxy.
They break and wane and wither, till upon some earth,

Faded and chill and shrunken, a pallid thing has birth;
And on a world weary with strife
Creeps forth the efflorescence Life.

Strange vegetations fiercely bloom and fall from sight;
Monsters uncouth are spawned, and sink into the night;
Huge mountains blossom white beneath the ocean spray;
Vast tropics glow where once the glacier-ice held sway—
Till, like a lichen on the stone,
Comes Man, bearing a soul unknown.

The lichen spreads, and civilisations grow forlorn,
Bloom once, and, dying, blight the place where they were born.
Incomparable, unique, each in lone splendour burns;
Each bears one perfect grace that nevermore returns.
Ah! gone is sculptured Egypt—gone
The blossom that was Babylon!

The lotus of the East, the Grecian lily cold—
Each blossoms only one new beauty to unfold.

And this rich rose, the West, that opens now so vast,
Shall tell its message, then upon the night be cast.
But still God scatters through the gloom
New seeds whence nobler flowers shall bloom.

And æons rise and fade, and still the petal-years
Fall from the trembling stem of Time, that proudly rears
Space, like the last huge blossom of the far-thrown seed;
And Space itself shall wither like a trampled weed.
But in the void the Sower still
Scatters new seed, until—until . . .

SYDNEY NOCTURNES.

FROM THE NORTH SHORE.

TO Day she would not show her charms:
But now the Night beseeches,
A white reproach of wistful arms
Over the bay she reaches.
Upon her gleaming bosom, wet
With tears and quivering,
In ropes of golden beauty set
Her vivid jewels swing.

Upon the pathway of the night
She, pausing often, paces;
About her body waves gleam white
Like froth of filmy laces;
And to her pleasure hurrying,
Their torches holding high,
On molten waters smouldering
The ferry-boats flame by.

KING STREET.

A morn, a sallow lamp-lit morn,
A dawn that never breaks to day!
Old, old the faces, and forlorn;
The hearts look out, so seared, so grey!
It is as if some upturned stone
Had flung to light a vermin rout—
For things misfeatured, souls unknown,
Stagger in blind amaze about.

Along their gleaming lines of light
The charging trams go, head to ground;
Out from the drifting pathways, white
The faces flash—like faces drowned!
And there with painted features drear,
And eyes whose pathos still is sweet,
The hunted hunters prowl and peer—
Their lair the long, slow-surging street.

IN HYDE PARK.

The white mist walks between the trees
In silver gown;
Her mystic floating draperies
The branches drown;
And lurking there with eager leer
And wonder new,
The lamps inquisitively peer
Their fingers through.

The world sighs wearily, with pain
Drawing tired breath;
The stars are like a silver rain;
And down beneath
On Night's smooth garment running o'er
In sullen flood,
The city, like a festering sore,
Oozes warm blood.

THE AUSTRALIAN.

ONCE more this Autumn-earth is ripe,
Parturient of another type.

While with the Past old nations merge
His foot is on the Future's verge;

They watch him, as they huddle pent,
Striding a spacious continent,

Above the level desert's marge
Looming in his aloofness large.

No flower with fragile sweetness graced—
A lank weed wrestling with the waste.

Pallid of face and gaunt of limb,
The sweetness withered out of him.

Sombre, indomitable, wan,
The juices dried, the glad youth gone.

A little weary from his birth;
His laugh the spectre of a mirth.

Bitter beneath a bitter sky,
To Nature he has no reply.

Wanton, perhaps, and cruel. Yes,
Is not his sun more merciless?

Joy has such niggard dole to give,
He laughs, a child, just glad to live.

So drab and neutral is his day
He gleans a splendour in the grey,

And from his life's monotony
He lifts a subtle melody.

When earth so poor a banquet makes
His pleasures at a gulp he takes.

The feast is his to the last crumb;
Drink while he can . . . the drought will come.

His heart a sudden tropic flower,
He loves and loathes within an hour.

Yet you who by the pools abide,
Judge not the man who swerves aside.

He sees beyond your hazy fears;
He roads the desert of the years.

Rearing his cities in the sand,
He builds where even God has banned.

With green a continent he crowns,
And stars a wilderness with towns.

His gyves of steel the great plain wears;
With paths the distances he snares.

A child who takes a world for toy,
To build a nation, or destroy.

His childish features frozen stern,
A nation's task he has to learn,

From feeble tribes to federate
One splendid peace-encompassed State.

But if there be no goal to reach?
The way lies open, dawns beseech!

Enough that he lay down his load
A little further on the road.

So, toward undreamt-of destinies
He slouches down the centuries.

FANCIES.

FROM WELLINGTON TERRACE.

WHITE stars above, red stars beneath,
And o'er the bay the brooding hills:
No murmur, save a quiet breath
That faintly through the darkness thrills.
The bay with shadowed lights a-blur;
On high a glow that waves and wanes;
And through the city here and there
The red-lit streets—like living veins!

THE PARADE.

Along the lamp-lit streets they glide and go:
Here Nature in her brutishness is nude:
See, thinly trickling from the age-old wound,
The steady stream of squandered womanhood!

THE SCULPTOR.

O'er the Eastern hills of light
While the dim world slept
Dawn the sculptor stepped,
And the shapeless block of Night
Chiselled into form
Morning-lit and warm.

THE EBB OF DAY.

The ebb of day has now begun;
The waters to the low west crowd;
But one forgotten wisp of cloud
Glows like a fragment of the sun,
And stranded on the shores of Night,
Where 'gainst the sky the telegraph
Stretching his dim, audacious path
Defiantly to heaven aspires,
There lies a maiden, drowned and white—
The torn Moon tangled in the wires!

THE REAPER.

The world is drowsy, the winds asleep,
On the sward of the sky the star-blossoms peep,
And the grey Moon moves with his silver scythe
The pallid flowers of light to reap.

A CHILD.

Little wisp of wonderment,
All the world your doll!
Hugging it in huge content,
Little wisp of wonderment;
Life has only laughter sent—
Everything is droll:
Little wisp of wonderment,
All the world your doll!

THE TUI.

Alchemist of melody,
    Drop by drop distilling!
Hidden high on some tall tree,
Alchemist of melody;
With your liquid minstrelsy
    All the forest filling:
Alchemist of melody,
    Drop by drop distilling!

DAWN.

Far in the Eastern passage-way a sudden light;
The stone that blocked the sepulchre is backward
    rolled;
And down into the fœtid, stifling vault of Night
The naked corpse of Dawn is lowered, grey and
    cold.

THE ANARCHIST.

THE dawn hangs heavy on the distant hill,
The darkness shudders slowly into light;
And from the weary bosom of the night
The pent winds sigh, then sink with horror still.

Naked and grey, the guillotine stands square
Upon the hill, while from its base the crowd
Surges out far, and waits, to silence cowed,
Impatient for the thing to happen there.

Listen! The bells within the tower toll
Five naked notes; and down within his cell
The prisoner hears and mutters, "It is well,"
Though like that other knife each cuts his soul.

His sick nerves from the probing echoes shrink,
"This is the end," he says; "let me be strong;
Let me be brave till then—'t is not for long:
I must not think of it—I must not think!"

See, through the courtyard, guarded, comes the slight
Thin figure of the anarchist. Amazed,
He sees the thousand faces swiftly raised—
The billows of the crowd break into white!

One narrow, alien glance below, and then
The scene fades dimly from his film-glazed eyes;
And shuddering he sees his past arise—
The cycle of his life begins again.

And as misshapen memories crowd fast
  Upon him, jostling in a sudden strife,
  Athwart the dull, drab level of his life
Stand sharply out the blood-stains of his past:

His youth, before he knew he had it, lost;
  His father's body by an accident
  'Neath the rich man's remorseless mill-wheels pent—
A corpse; and sister, mother, brother tossed

Out to the mercy of the merciless.
  His mother stricken next; her humble niche
  Was needed by the reckless and the rich,
And death was easier than life's loneliness.

His sister, she had fortune in her face,
  And won it, too, till Vice's fingers tore
  The freshness from her figure, and no more
In idleness she flaunted her disgrace.

He lost her, stifled in the world's wide smother,
  For years; till one night on the street they met.
  She seized him—he can feel that hot thrill yet!—
She spoke him—knowing not he was her brother!

Wrong reeking of the rich incessantly!
  Oppression and oppression o'er again!
  Till from the smouldering hate within his brain
Mad fever fired the fuse of Anarchy.

Then plot and cunning, weak, futile and mean,
  The maddened one against the many; thus
  He strove to strangle Order's octopus—
And gained the goal at last—the guillotine!

It waits him grim and grey; he sees it not,
  Nor hears the rising murmur ripple out
  To the crowd's edge, and, turning, die in doubt.
The vague, uncertain future threatens—what?

So . . . shall he speak, fling out his last reply
  Why waste the time in trivialities?
  One throbbing thought now holds him; and
    there is
No room for sign or speech—he has to die.

Only a murmur wavers up and shakes
  The sullen air, then hesitates and dies;
  And the grim hush of horror stifled lies.
Suspended like a billow ere it breaks.

One bitter prayer, half-curse, he mutters when
  The knife hangs high above, and the world waits.
  But ere it swoops an age it hesitates:
The word is given, breaths are drawn, and then . . .

With eyes and soul close shut—be swift, relief!—
  The prisoner waits the end that does not come.
  For hark! that heavy, low, tumultuous hum
That surges, surges till it shouts "*Reprieve!*"

"*Reprieved and pardoned!*" All his senses swim
In a rose-mist! As Sleep's soft hand that soothes
The terse, strained limbs of fevered Day and smoothes
Life's knotted nerves—so comes relief to him.

And when he woke again his soul, set free,
Had wandered far, within a moment's space,
And seen the sadness of God's silent face—
The mighty calm of immortality.

How like a triumph his home-coming! Then
The glorious news that met him, how that Right
Had routed Wrong, for ever faction's fight
Was finished, and the world was one again.

Then swiftly through his swimming, mist-dimmed eyes
He sees the good and great upright again;
And Reason rings the knell of grief and pain;
The gladdened new world lapped in sunlight lies.

Long life was his with honour. On Fame's breath
His name was borne, until in perfect peace—
Glad like a mellow fruit to fall and cease—
His long life ripened richly into death.

Yet none knew this but he. The crowd still waits;
Shoots swift the lightning of the knife, and loud
Roars the hoarse thunder from the sated crowd
And justice has been done. God compensates.

A SONG OF FAILURE.

HERE is my hand to you, brother,
You of the ruck who have failed
I, too, am only another
Fighter who faltered and quailed.
Now with my courage for token
Here to grim Fate I give tithe;
I, too, am beaten and broken,
Lying, the swath of the scythe!

We to the conquerors' seeming
Crouch, an incongruous horde—
Fighters, enmeshed in their dreaming,
Dreamers who girt on the sword,
Weaklings with splendid ambitions,
Heroes who learnt to succumb,
Poets a-swoon in their visions,
Singers with ecstasy dumb.

Failed! So we cast off our burden,
Done with our doubts and our fears:
These we have won for our guerdon—
Pity and tears—women's tears!
You with your conquests unending
Dwell from a woman apart;
Only the humble and bending
Learn the low door to her heart.

We that lie dumb in your scorning
Made you the heroes you are,

Built you a road to the morning,
  Taught you to reach for a star:
We have had sight of the glory,
  Pointed it clear to the blind;
Yours is the conquerors' story,
  Ours is the vision you find.

Here is no dread and no grieving;
  Over us hurtles the fray,
Is yours a Heav'n worth achieving,
  If it be stormed in a day?
Here is this world we must live in—
  Little to lose or to gain;
More is it worth to have striven
  Than in the end to attain.

THE GARDEN OF THE SEA.

THE infinite garden of the sea is His
To play in. Gravely smiling He resigns
To man his choice—this rugged plot of earth,
Watches man tear it with his deep canals,
Wound it with iron rails, scar it with roads,
And spot its pleasant freshness with the sore
Of festering cities, oozing heavy smoke.

He sees and He forgives. Then gently takes
His pliant sea into His yearning hands—
As an old mother might caress a doll
When all her sons are dead—and wistfully
He moulds it. O, that He might so thrust man—
That interloping soul of stubbornness—
The solitary irreconcilable
Of His subservient Universe—within
The grim, unalterable grooves of law!

But, ah! the sea, the fecund woman-sea,
Is His to fashion as He wills! He girds
It round with whitely gleaming paths of beach;
Then, at His word, the blossoms of the spray
Rise on their swaying wave-stalks, bloom and break,
And scatter desolate petals on the foam.

League-long His flower-bordered avenues
In bending sward of blossom run. Lo, now
A winter comes unwonted, heaping high

His garden world with snow of wasted blooms.
Or Spring sweeps in resistless, and the sea
Shimmers—an orchard in her nuptial white!

And sometimes He will smooth His garden plot,
And cover with trim tapestry of grass
Its restless beauty, till there shyly break
The daisies through, like pale hands timorous
And fragile, groping blindly to the sun.

Sometimes he plans great curving pathways, where
'Neath sullen shoulders of cool greenery
The shadows crouch, and high above the sun
Whispers his sunny secrets to the boughs
That sway and ripple everlastingly.

And sometimes, hidden by a moving ridge
From ships that flit like furtive white moths by,
The Master of the garden gravely walks
The cool green paths in reverie along:
Ah, what if I could turn into that lane
Of pulsing wave, and see Him pacing there,
As once of old they saw Him, with that look
Of wistful sadness on His old kind face!

BEREFT.

FOR nine drear nights my darling has been dead;
And ah, dear God! I cannot dream of her!

Now I shall see her always lying white—
A frozen flower beneath a snow of flowers,
Drowned in a sea of fragrance. I shall hear
In every silence of the coming years
Only the muffled horror from the room
Where I had left my little child asleep—
And found a nameless thing shut in and sealed . . .
And I shall never feel her breath that kissed
Me closer than her lips did; for the thick,
Dead perfume of slow-drooping flowers has drawn
A veil across my memory. . . . She is dead;
For nine drear nights I have not dreamed of her.

When, all a tangle of wee clambering limbs,
And little gusts of laughter and of tears,
Sun-flecked and shadow-stricken every hour,
She played about me, I could lie all night
And dream of her. She came in wondrous ways,
Hiding behind the dark to startle me;
Then leaping down the vistas of the night,
And yielding all her wistful soul to me
With kisses tenderer and words more sweet
Than that mad, random vehemence of love
She lavished on me through her laughing day.

And now she has been dead nine dreary nights,
And ah, dear God! I cannot dream of her!

Her idle hoop is hung against the wall,
And in the dusk her cherished garments seem
As if still warmed with all her eager life.
And here the childish story that she wrote
Herself, and never finished;—how one day
With puzzled pucker of her brow she stopped
Mid-sentence! as if God had gravely held
A finger up to hush her, and she knew
She was to keep His secrets;—soon, so soon,
Perhaps He whispered low, she would know all.

And now she has been dead nine long sad nights;
And ah, dear God! I cannot dream of her!

So I shall see her always lying white—
A frozen flower beneath a snow of flowers,
Drowned in a sea of fragrance. Now it seems
As if the memories I hold of her
Have shrivelled with the lilies that she loved
And lay with on her little narrow bed.
And now she will not murmur through my dreams
Those faint, strange words that mean so much in
dreams,
And wither with the morn. I lie awake
And whisper to my hopes, "To-night I 'll hear
Her petulant hands knock at my dreams' shut gate;

And oh, the gladness when I let her in!
Hush! what a patter of impatient feet
Down the long staircase of the stars!" And then
I sleep, and with an endless weariness
I grope among the spaces of the dark
For rhythm of her unresting feet, or touch
Of her caressing fingers, or the kiss
And whisper of her little self-willed curls;
But never lifts her laugh across the dark,
And never may I smooth her wilful curls,
And when I wake again I see her yet,
So pitifully thin and chill and straight,
Who used to be all curves—a living flame!

For nine drear nights my darling has been dead,
And till I die I cannot dream of her.

Perhaps she aches to come, shut in her grave—
So deep to dig to hide that tender form!
Dear God! she is too frail and weak to climb
The horror of those walls that hedge her in;
And when you call her to you let me be
Close by her side to lift her little feet
Up to the grass and sunshine of this world,
That lacking her is now so desolate.

So I have called and called . . . she does not come.
And yet I know the way into my heart
She has not quite forgotten . . . She does not come.
And now for nine drear nights she has been dead;
And ah, dear God! I cannot dream of her!

A QUESTION.

AND so in the death-darkened chamber they met,
The woman that once he had loved and the one he loved yet—
The wife who had warped his desire and the woman he could not forget.

They stood by the bier where between them he slept,
And the love he had lost in his wife to her swimming eyes leapt;
But the woman his life had belonged to—his paramour—spoke not nor wept.

It was only a story of sated desire—
Of a love merely sensual burnt to an ash by its fire,
And a husband who turned to a more luscious love that was his for the hire.

All had sinned. For the husband had killed by his clutch,
Rough-handed, the fruit of a love that had dropped at his touch.
One woman's great sin was not loving, his wife's was in loving too much.

And so he had died; it was over at last;
And across him the two women looked at each other aghast—
Across his cold corse, and across the cold corse of the loathsome dead Past!

Then the smouldering love of the wife leapt to flame,
And she poured forth her kisses upon him, and called on his name.
But the other said "No, he is nothing to you; soul and body *I* claim!"

They looked at each other awhile. Said the wife wearily,
"He is mine; for I loved him, and ever shall love him; let be!"
But the other sneered, "No, he is mine, and mine only, because he loved me!"

Then the two laid their hands on the body between;
And fought for it, wife against paramour, fiercely, unseen—
For the body diseased and polluted, as ever his spirit had been.

And this is a question for answer in Hell:
To which of the two did his spirit belong, can you tell?
Think, was it the woman he loved, or the one who had loved him too well?

EPITAPH.

The Earth Speaks:

HUSH! he drowses, drowses deep,
While my quiet arms I keep
Close about him in his sleep.

Once he glanced at me aghast,
Shuddered from my kiss, and passed—
But I hold him here at last.

He had frenzied thoughts of fame,
Piteous strivings for a name—
But I called him, and he came.

Called him with the mother-call
That shall on the weary fall,
Whispering "Home" to all, to all.

Fair white skin he looked upon;
Eyes in his with passion shone;
But my patient love has won.

There was one he deemed to wed;
But he faltered, came instead
To my narrow bridal bed.

Vehement his veins and wild—
Now a dreaming, glad-eyed child
To my kisses reconciled.

Tender heart and turbulent,
I and he together pent
In an æon of content!

Heaven holds for him no prize:
Stirless, nested here he lies
In his narrow Paradise.

When his trump God's Angel blows,
When he shudders, wakens, knows,
I shall hold him close, so close!

He will feel life's aching pain,
Turn his lips to me, and then
Sink to dreamless sleep again.

So for aye my love I keep
Here upon my breast asleep—
Hush! . . . he drowses . . . drowses . . . deep.

THE MINSTREL.

THE MINSTREL:

AN INCIDENT IN ONE ACT.

PERSONS.

THE KING, THE QUEEN, EARL ATHULF, THE MINSTREL.

Heralds, Pages, Men-at-Arms, Sentries.

TIME: THE PAST.

SCENE:

Night in a hall of Castle Ydoyne. The roof is supported at the back by rows of pillars of rough stone, between whose aisles is dimly seen an open balcony. In front the paved floor is strewn with skins of animals of the chase. Tapestry hangs against the walls. On the left is placed a broad stone seat, and behind it a curtain conceals a door. Behind the pillars to the left there is another door. On the right the floor rises gradually in a broad sweep of low, carpeted steps, which lead to the large brass-studded doors giving entrance to the throne room. When these are opened a great double throne can be seen. Torches placed in rude sconces against the foremost pillars and the walls light the hall, but the end of the room that opens upon the balcony is in obscurity.

Standing on the steps is the Queen, a young and beautiful woman, fair, and delicately framed. From under her golden crown a long plait of tawny hair falls down her back. She is dressed in white, and in her jewelled girdle wears a long-stemmed large dark rose.

She has just come in, and is looking down, in an attitude of surprise, at the form of the Minstrel, who lies asleep on the broad low stairs. The Minstrel is a young man, his costume sober black, the only relief to which is a thin silver chain about his neck. His face is pale. By his side is a small archaic harp.

The Queen takes the rose from her girdle, and plays with it absently, as she contemplates the sleeping Minstrel.

THE QUEEN. Asleep! The Minstrel sleeps, and dreams, perchance,
Those quiet songs across whose melodies
Grey faces peer, and cold eyes glow again,
And dumb lips whisper memories long dead.
When all his soul lies open to his dreams
What happy strains the winds of sleep may waft
Across the loosened strings! So still! His soul
Has glided from the portal Sleep, and gone
With noiseless steps into the sister gate
Of Death. Then no more songs!
[*The Minstrel stirs*]
Ah no, he smiles!
He has a wistful smile, as though . . . [*impetuously*] Ah, God!

If I could only sleep and know again
Those ever-hurrying dreams that all the night
Made happy children's laughter in my heart.
But now I dare not even dream.

[*The Minstrel stirs*]

He moves . . .
That wistful smile again! Minstrel, awake!
Your Queen cares not to see you so in love
With that sweet sleep that will have none of her.
Minstrel, awake!

[*She draws the rose lightly across his lips. He stirs again*]

THE MINSTREL [*murmuring*] Oh, Blauncheflor!

THE QUEEN. My name!
Why mutters he my name? Sirrah, awake!

[*She bends over him and takes him by the shoulder. The plait of her hair sweeps his face. He opens his dark eyes, and after a moment of wonder, raises himself upon one elbow, gazing at the Queen. She has drawn back, and stands haughtily regarding him*]

THE MINSTREL. The Queen! . . . Your pardon, lady! I was glad,
And so for very gladness fell asleep
To taste the moment to its uttermost
By weaving round it all the melody
Of errant fancies. So I fell asleep.

THE QUEEN. Happy to slip from happiness in life
To happiness in dreams.
[*The Minstrel is about to rise*]
Nay, do not stir!
[*She seats herself upon the steps*]

THE MINSTREL [*taking his harp*] Your Majesty would hear me sing?

THE QUEEN [*with a gesture of weariness*] Nay, nay!
You could not sing a peace into a heart
That is all fire. Methinks your daily task
Is one of little use. Perchance you charm
An hour away with song, but at the close
Of your sweet magic all the thoughts that wait
Within the torture-chamber of the brain
Take up their work again, again begin
The torment of their endless questionings.

THE MINSTREL [*rising*] No, no! the sceptre that a singer holds
Is mightier than a king's. You sway a state,
And I mayhap one heart; you proudly build
Vast temples, teeming cities, and I weave
A little song of love; and when the years
Have come and passed, your cities and your fanes
Lie shattered, broken, desolate—but no!
Out of the silences that guard the place
A peasant sings my love-song to a maid.

THE QUEEN [*leaning back*] 'T is so, and yet——

THE MINSTREL [*mounting a step*] You scatter royal gifts,
Shower largess on a shouting populace;
And I bestow upon one troubled heart
The language that makes love articulate,
And lets a dumb and solitary grief
Flow like reviving tears. I swing a bridge
Of sympathy from soul to lonely soul;
And borne upon the current of my song
The hand that gropes shall find the hand that guides,
And Grief whose tears are shed shall comfort Grief,
And Sorrow still her sobbings on the breast
Of Sorrow.

THE QUEEN [*leaving the steps*] Yes, you comfort—but too late!
Had you the power to warn, to shew where sin
Lurked even in a lover's smile . . .

THE MINSTREL [*starting towards her*] My Queen!

THE QUEEN [*taking him almost fiercely by the shoulder*] Ah, had you one still eve, a month agone,
But sung that little lilting song of love
That seems to smell of orchards vestal-white
With blossom, and that on my forehead lays
Cool hands of innocence—had you but sung
That little lilting song when someone stood

Pleading and pleading for my lips—ah, then !
Perchance I——

THE MINSTREL. Yes ! yes !

THE QUEEN [*releasing him, and looking past him. Her arm has fallen heavily to her side*] Could have slept and dreamed
As happily as you.

THE MINSTREL [*sadly*] Is it too late
To sing that poor song now ?

THE QUEEN [*moving to the seat*] Before God, nay !
It is not yet too late.

THE MINSTREL [*taking his harp*] Then I shall sing !

THE QUEEN [*after a pause*] No, let me fight this fight out ! let me make
My fate my own, whether I win or fall !
[*Swiftly turning to the Minstrel*]
I found you sleeping, and above you stood
And wondered what your dreams were. And methought
I heard your soft lips murmur——

THE MINSTREL [*startled*] Murmur what ?

THE QUEEN. My name. "O Blauncheflor ! " you sighed.

THE MINSTREL [*affrighted*] Your name ?
My lips said that ?

THE QUEEN [*sinking into the seat*] Yes, with a sigh so faint,

Meseemed I had not heard my name before.

THE MINSTREL [*stepping impulsively towards her*] My queen!

THE QUEEN [*almost sternly*] How comes it that a minstrel dare
Even to dream the name worn by his queen?

THE MINSTREL [*softly turning away*] Nay, it was not your name.

THE QUEEN [*disappointed*] Not mine? Then whose?

THE MINSTREL. The name of one I love.

THE QUEEN [*with a little laugh*] Then *you* can love?
And she?

THE MINSTREL. She did not look for love so far
Beneath her. So she married; happily,
I think. And now my life seems only mine
To yield to her again in service.

THE QUEEN So.
You would still serve her?

THE MINSTREL. Once she loved my songs,
But songs are feeble things when here is life
To lay beneath her feet. If I might die
To serve her, that were happiness enough!

THE QUEEN [*laughing*] An ardent knight, forsooth!

THE MINSTREL [*turning away*] Though I have crushed

And stilled my endless longing, yet my heart
Pursues its memories in dreams, and speaks
Through my dead lips the name that once lay there
Close as a woman's kiss.

THE QUEEN [*tenderly*] And so her name——

THE MINSTREL. Like yours, was Blauncheflor.

THE QUEEN. Ah, so again!
I know now I have never heard my name
Before, so tranquilly its music dies
Upon your gentle lips. And this false love,
Was—was she beautiful?

THE MINSTREL [*earnestly*] Most wondrously.

THE QUEEN [*with a little smile of confidence*] As beautiful as I?

THE MINSTREL [*after a pause, looking steadfastly at her*] As beautiful.

THE QUEEN [*pausing and reading his face; then rising, and crossing the room*] I am right glad this maiden has been wed,
Else she and I would quarrel.

THE MINSTREL [*starting forward passionately*] Dear, my queen!
All I shall tell you, though it cost my life.

[*She draws back, regarding him in surprise. At this moment a dark figure glides down between the pillars, and pauses on seeing the Queen and the Minstrel.*

It is Earl Athulf, a swarthy, bearded man of middle age, dressed magnificently. In his belt he carries a poignard.

The Minstrel makes obeisance to the Earl and silently withdraws, leaving the Queen and the Earl confronting each other. As the Minstrel departs the Queen turns]

THE QUEEN. I wait the King; beguile us till he come
With some sweet broken song. [*With meaning*] Until he come!

[*The Minstrel with a silent obeisance retires out of sight beyond the pillars*]

THE QUEEN [*turning gladly to Earl Athulf*] Dear Athulf! Here at last!

EARL ATHULF [*kissing her hand*] My queen! my love!

THE QUEEN. I sent for you.

EARL ATHULF. Dear, is it not too rash
To meet me here? The King may pass, and find——

THE QUEEN. Me in your arms? Ah, no! [*The Minstrel is heard crooning a song*] The Minstrel! Hush!
'T is an old song.

EARL ATHULF [*impatiently*] I do not love his voice.
But if the King——

THE QUEEN [*coming close to him*] Sweet, it is dangerous,
But so is all our love. You do not fear?

EARL ATHULF. Fear! O my queen, with you?

THE QUEEN. And I have news,
A rumour!

EARL ATHULF. What, the King?

THE QUEEN. Suspects!

EARL ATHULF. What, all?

THE QUEEN. All—more than all!

EARL ATHULF. Then let him find me thus—
[*Clasping her*]
And kill me, here, like an intruder bee
Caught in the dainty chalice of a flower.

THE QUEEN [*withdrawing herself gently*] Nay, dear; this moment you must fly!

EARL ATHULF. Leave *you?*

THE QUEEN. The King intends to banish you, and finds
The childish pretext of an embassy
To Yrmengarde, where you will meet your death—
The knife of an assassin.

EARL ATHULF [*starting*] Ha, my death!

THE QUEEN. So fly to-night!

EARL ATHULF [*seizing her hand*] Without you ? No.

[*The voice of the Minstrel is heard singing at the back of the hall*]

THE QUEEN. Hush! Hush!

[*They stand listening. The song grows louder and clearer, as the Minstrel is seen coming down between the pillars*]

SONG—THE MINSTREL.

All for the kiss of a maid
Honour and duty we fling,
Love shall be ever obeyed—
Love is the King—the King!

[*The last four words are almost shouted. The Queen disengages her hand from Earl Athulf's clasp. At the last words of the Minstrel's song they look at each other in sudden comprehension and start apart*]

THE QUEEN [*swiftly and in fear*] The King! [*whispers*] Wait here! I shall return.

EARL ATHULF [*whispers*] To-night!

[*They stand motionless, one on each side of the room as the King enters. He is a man of noble stature, simply dressed. He wears a golden crown, carries a sceptre, and in his belt is a jewelled poignard. His face expresses great determination, and clear intellect. He is preceded by two heralds, and followed by two pages. He enters from the left by way of the centre aisle. The Minstrel stands aside as the*

procession approaches, and bends his head as the King passes. The King frowns slightly as his glance takes in the presence of Earl Athulf. The Queen and the Earl make obeisance to him]

THE KING. Earl Athulf, aptly met!

EARL ATHULF. Your Majesty?

THE KING. I was about to send for you; but lo!
My Queen has found you first.

THE QUEEN. We met, my liege,
By chance.

THE KING. Kind chance! I have a task for you,
An embassy that will not brook delay.
You start for Yrmengarde to-morrow morn,
And travel with all speed.

EARL ATHULF. And when return,
My liege?

THE KING [*slowly*] When it is safe.

THE QUEEN [*starting forward*] What means——?

THE KING [*sneeringly*] The task
Courts danger; and you fear?

EARL ATHULF. That word to me!
Beware, I might forget your kingship!
[*He fingers his poignard*]

THE KING [*incensed at the action, and losing control of himself*] Nay,
I want no majesty to meet you! Here,

I 'll front you, man for man! You skulking thief!
That sought to steal a love you could not win.

[*He draws his poignard*]

EARL ATHULF [*gladly*] Ha, man for man! Your majesty is kind.

[*They confront each other, about to attack, watching each other warily. The Queen stands on the steps, as if transfixed with horror. The heralds and the pages make no move. The Minstrel, who has sprung forward at the first word of anger, now stands close to the Queen. He strikes a loud chord on his harp. The sound makes the two antagonists pause. The Queen rushes down between them*]

THE QUEEN. Ah, do not strike!

THE KING. You start to-morrow, then?

EARL ATHULF [*sheathing his poignard*] I set forth at the dawn.

THE KING [*sheathing his poignard*] 'T is well! [*shortly*] Good-bye.
It may be long before we meet again.

THE QUEEN [*horrified*] Long?

EARL ATHULF [*bending his head*] Good, my liege, Farewell!

THE KING [*aside*] She meant to save
One . . . Ah! but which? Ah, not to know her heart!

Never to know her heart!

[*He observes the Queen, who is about to speak to Earl Athulf*]

I wait for you;
I have a cause to try.

THE QUEEN [*aside to Earl Athulf*] We cannot part
So coldly. Nay, I want a word—a kiss!

[*To the King*]

A cause so late to-night?

THE KING. Dissension, sown
Of some haphazard word misunderstood,
Has grown between a husband and a wife—
Who wait me, strangers, wistful, but too proud
To plead for love.

THE QUEEN [*observing that Earl Athulf is about to go*]
They wait, you said? Yes?

[*Aside, to Earl Athulf*]

Wait!

THE KING. The wife is thirsty for the words of love
That are to her love's self; the husband loves,
But knows a kiss can never sum up life.

THE QUEEN. And your decision?

THE KING. There is need for none.
He loves, and love must pardon.

THE QUEEN. All?

THE KING Aye, all.
Love is not love until it dare forgive.

Love sees the imperfection in the flower
And loves the crumpled petal, for he knows
Each flaw is but a wish that blindly probes
In quest of some new beauty, dimly dreamed.
Love knows, but dare not judge. Love's final word
Is Love. [*To the Queen*] Come to the judgment-hall!

[*The heralds sound a trumpet blast; the doors swing open; the pages follow as the King ascends the steps to the throne room*]

EARL ATHULF [*as the queen dallies in passing him*] Farewell!

[*He waits with bowed head. The Queen joins her consort. A moment later she glances round again, and deliberately throws down the red rose that she has taken from her girdle. Earl Athulf, however, does not observe her action. The Minstrel sees the rose fall, and after a quick glance at the Earl, he steps forward so as to conceal it from him. The King and his consort, and their train, have by this time left the hall. The Minstrel picks up the flower and puts it silently to his lips; then follows the King. The doors are closed. Earl Athulf is left standing silent with bowed head. Men-at-arms enter and extinguish some of the torches, leaving only three torches on each side wall, and one affixed to each of the nearest two pillars. The room is some-*

what darkened. The men-at-arms silently retire. Earl Athulf, with a gesture of defeat, turns, and flings himself upon the seat.

The voice of the Minstrel is heard singing in the outer room]

SONG—THE MINSTREL.

The flowers lift their lips to the bee;
He kisses their bosoms of bloom.
Their fragrance and favours are free—
They are brides and the bee is the groom.
But he who steals love from her nest
Must fear for the wrath of her mate;
There 's a vengeance that waits for his breast—
At his heart there 's a poignard of hate!

EARL ATHULF [*with a shudder*] That song! It almost chills my veins to death.
I dare not . . . Yet the Queen shall fly with me!
Before, I loved her merely; now the King
Throws down the gage I 'll take the lists with him,
And fight him for the prize—a woman's heart—
And win!

[*He rises. A fanfare is heard in the judgment room*]

The King has left the hall. 'T is late;

[*One of the eight torches expires*]

That dying torch is herald of the dawn,
When we must both be far. The royal fool

Has kissed his faithful queen a cold good-night,
And haply sleeps content: while I——

[*The throne room doors open and the Queen enters stealthily*]

And she ——

THE QUEEN [*coming into his arms*] My love!

EARL ATHULF. The King?

THE QUEEN. We parted in the hall.
He kissed me.

[*She shudders*]

Athulf, let me have your lips
Quick—so!

[*She kisses him passionately*]

His subjects praise him, for to all
He grants the justice that they clamour for;

[*Withdrawing herself and crossing the hall*]

And all I ask is just a little wisp
Of love to wind about my heart and his! . . .
Justice for all the realm—and for his wife,
Hungry and passionate for love, he keeps
Chill words of courtesy, thin kindnesses
That make me wince! I do not ask for much;
For if he has not love to give, my heart
Would be content with those poor fripperies
Of sentiment—dear tricks of eye and tongue
A woman loves to dally with, and deck
A paltry love with till she cheats herself
That it grows beautiful. All that I asked
Was just that faint unconscious groping kiss

Of fingers that each other blindly find
As two pace side by side; just that rich glance
That lingers half-forgotten on the face
Of her he loves; that quick exchange of trust—
That question asked and answered in a look—
When lovers meet and part; that lower tone
Which seems to draw one close like a caress.
I did not ask for much!

[*The Minstrel is seen at the door, which has been left open*]

EARL ATHULF [*taking her in his arms*] I give you all,
And more!

[*He kisses her*]

THE QUEEN [*relinquishing all effort*] So sweet!

[*The Minstrel passes silently and unobserved by them among the pillars*]

EARL ATHULF. My Blauncheflor!

THE QUEEN [*aside*] My name!
Yet not my name. No other lips can draw
Its sweetness out until it seems a song.

[*To the Earl*]

You love me?

EARL ATHULF [*passionately*] All, body and soul!

THE QUEEN. And name?

EARL ATHULF. Your name is but the perfume of the flower—
Pure, delicate, and perfect; but I pluck

The blossom's self, and so I cull its all—
Beauty and grace and perfume—Blanchefl or!

THE QUEEN. But my poor Minstrel takes my name alone
Upon his lips, and is content to love
The fragrance. Ah, I like that kind of love!

EARL ATHULF. The love that sips a sweet and passes on;
But mine is steadfast. Then at dawn we fly?

[*The voice of the Minstrel is heard faintly singing from the balcony*].

THE QUEEN [*dreamily*] Listen! the Minstrel sings again. Oh, hush!

EARL ATHULF [*passionately*] The Minstrel! Nay, the only voice I 'll hear
Is yours—yours when you whisper shamefaced words
Of love that almost dies to know itself!

THE QUEEN [*repulsing him abstractedly*] Listen! the song again.

EARL ATHULF. Nay, answer me!
You come? My heart, you have not said!

THE QUEEN [*moving away*] Oh, hush!

SONG—THE MINSTREL.

The flowers lift their lips to the bee;
He kisses their bosoms of bloom.
Their fragrance and favours are free,
They are brides and the bee is the groom.

J

But he who steals love from her nest
Must fear for the wrath of her mate :
There 's a vengeance that waits for his breast ;
At his heart there's a poignard of hate !

[*Another of the torches expires. The Queen comes forward, and putting her hand on Earl Athulf's shoulder looks long into his face. At last he turns away. The Queen moves back among the pillars*]

EARL ATHULF [*to himself*] The poignard and the hate! Yes, each is sure.

[*He turns to the Queen, who stands with her back to him*]

Dear love! haply 't were better that I fled
Alone.

THE QUEEN [*without turning, in a low voice*] Alone?

EARL ATHULF. We might be captured, slain.
'T were best I hurried to the confines first,
Where I shall bide until a safer way
Opens for you to join me. Ill must come
Of this mad haste. Better that we should wait.

THE QUEEN [*turning on him fiercely*] You traitor, can love wait?

EARL ATHULF [*withdrawing*] Discretion!

THE QUEEN. Fool!
Capitulating to a braggart song!
Gird on your love, and beat his arrows down!

You would not leave me now, whose lips have drained
The brimming goblet of your love, to taste
The dregs of his chill kisses. No, dear heart!
[*She throws herself into his arms; he staggers forward with her. They stand swaying.*]
You dare not thrust me from you!

EARL ATHULF [*passionately clasping her*] Ah, forgive!
I love you; you have made me strong.

THE QUEEN. Sweet love!
[*Another of the torches expires*]

EARL ATHULF. The courtyard is below; we meet there then
At dawn—I scent the day e'en now.

THE QUEEN. Yes! Yes!

[*The voice of the Minstrel is heard again. They stand in each other's arms, listening*]

SONG—THE MINSTREL.

All for the kiss of a maid
Honour and duty we fling;
Love! and be never afraid;
Love is the king, the king!
Love has the world at his lure;
Yet here is a truth that is sure—
Love to endure
Must be passionate-pure—
Love must be passionate-pure!

THE QUEEN [*withdrawing slowly from his arms*] That song, that little lilting song of love,
That seems to smell of orchards vestal-white
With blossom, and that on my forehead lays
Cool hands of innocence—that song again!

EARL ATHULF. The sickly qualm has passed, and now I know
I love you more than all—than life, than death,
Than honour!

THE QUEEN. Honour!—no. Sure never joy
Can come of such a selfish love as ours.
Duty is more than love. I dare not go!

EARL ATHULF [*seizing her wrist*] Be valiant! From my breast my peevish doubts
Have faded with the song.

THE QUEEN. Not dead, the song!
It lives! it lives within my heart!

[*Another torch dies. The first faint flush of dawn steals down between the pillars, vaguely showing the outlines of the open balcony and the distant ramparts of the castle. Earl Athulf strides to the balcony*]

EARL ATHULF. The day!
My steed waits in the courtyard.
[*He returns to the hall*]
Come, my sweet!

THE QUEEN [*wildly*] I cannot think; that song beats in my brain
Remorselessly!

EARL ATHULF. Ere day is white I start.
What word have you for me ?

THE QUEEN [*slowly*] But one—Farewell!

EARL ATHULF. You will not come ?

THE QUEEN. Farewell!

EARL ATHULF. One kiss!

THE QUEEN. Farewell!
Speed for your life! I dare not even kiss.
She moves toward the left door. The day grows brighter]

EARL ATHULF. The river of the morn comes rippling in,
And I must spur. But as I pass below
I 'll rein my steed beneath the balcony
One moment. Should you call ——

THE QUEEN [*suddenly arrested*] Yes! Yes!

EARL ATHULF. My steed
Shall bear a double burden o'er the moat,
And so—I wait your call.

THE QUEEN. Perhaps——
[*She turns to go*]
Perhaps—— !
[*She goes out silently through the left door. Another torch expires*]

EARL ATHULF. These women and their moods!
So all is lost—
Save life; and now for flight!

[*He goes to the door at the right, but pauses as he sees the Minstrel coming down between the pillars. Earl Athulf descends the steps. They confront each other*].

EARL ATHULF. The Minstrel!

THE MINSTREL. I!

EARL ATHULF. So your sleek song can steal into a heart
My kisses could not stir. You meddling fool!
Your song stabs deep, but here 's a keener song,
My poignard for your heart!

[*He raises his poignard. The Minstrel, being defenceless, retreats to the pillars*]

THE MINSTREL [*breathlessly*] I have no sword!

[*Earl Athulf follows him to the pillars and stabs him in the breast*]

THE MINSTREL [*staggering down toward the seat*] Ah, God!

EARL ATHULF [*following him with raised poignard, ready to repeat the stroke*] Sweet music when a dagger plays!

THE MINSTREL. A coward stroke!

[*He supports himself against the seat*]

EARL ATHULF [*putting up his poignard*] No need for more! So soon—
So swiftly is the music stilled!

THE MINSTREL [*in agony*] My queen!

[*To Earl Athulf*]

You kill the singer, but the song lies deep,
Beyond the reach of dagger, in her heart!
You cannot murder me; the song was mine,
And I the song!

EARL ATHULF [*sneering*] Content yourself with that!

[*Another torch expires. The room is filled with the dim white light of the day. Earl Athulf goes out swiftly through the throne room*]

THE MINSTREL [*staggering across and sinking upon the steps*] To die for her! O, God is wondrous good!
My songs were beaten back! but here 's my life
To save her. Blauncheflor!

[*One of the two torches left expires. In his agony the Minstrel stirs, and unconsciously takes the position in which he was first seen asleep. The hall is now quite light. The Queen enters from the left door and moves to the pillars. She has taken off her crown and is clad as if for a journey*]

THE QUEEN. My name again!
Then Athulf calls. That song has ceased to pulse
Within my weary brain, and I can think.
Yes, love has won; I dare risk all for love!
And Athulf wins me!

[*She listens*]

If he should have passed—

[*She goes to the balcony and looks out*]

No, for I 'll hear the clatter of his horse
Upon the stones.

THE MINSTREL. O Blauncheflor!

[*She comes down to the steps and sees the Minstrel*]

THE QUEEN. Again
The Minstrel sleeping! Nay, he gave his songs
To save me, so I 'll kiss him where he dreams;
The gift of my stained lips is little worth,
And yet 't is all I have. It grieves me sore
Even to part from him; he served me well.

[*She bends over him to kiss him*]

He sleeps most soundly; he shall never know.

[*She starts, as she notices the blood at his breast. Then, horrified—*]

What—hurt!

THE MINSTREL [*with a last effort plucking the red rose from his doublet, and putting it to his lips*] O Blauncheflor!

THE QUEEN. Again my name!
Dear God! not dead?

[*She leans over him and lifts him to her, looking anxiously into his face. Her cloak falls to her feet. He opens his eyes, then his form suddenly relaxes*]

Too late!

[*She kisses his forehead reverently. From below is heard the noise of a horse in the paved court-yard. The Queen recognises it and listens*]

'T is Athulf! Yes!

He waits beneath the balcony.

[*The noise ceases. She looks back into the Minstrel's face. Suddenly she is overcome with horror*]

Oh! stabbed

By Athulf! Murderer! I dare not call.

[*She waits, listening, with the body in her arms. After a pause, the noise of the horse's steps is heard again. She reverently puts down the body. As she does so she notices the red rose in the Minstrel's hand. She uncloses the fingers and takes it; then rises*]

A rose? What does he with a rose in death?

[*The voice of a sentry is heard outside*]

THE VOICE OF THE SENTRY. Who passes?

THE VOICE OF EARL ATHULF. Athulf, on the King's commands!

THE VOICE OF THE SENTRY. Pass then in peace, Earl Athulf!

[*The distant noise of the portcullis falling is heard. The Queen makes a gesture of relief. She looks down at the body, then at the rose. Suddenly she understands*]

THE QUEEN. O, dear God!
The Minstrel, too . . . and never said . . .
My rose!

[*The day is clear and white. She stands looking down upon the dead Minstrel. The last torch flickers out. Under the stress of her grief the Queen crumples the rose. Its petals fall in a little shower upon the Minstrel's face*].

THE END.

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